

**Social Justice in UK Counselling Psychology:  
Exploring the perspectives' of members of the  
profession who have a high interest in and  
commitment to social justice**

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The University of Manchester

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**Abstract**

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*Background and objectives:* Despite a large amount of theoretical literature, empirical research into the area of social justice in counselling psychology has been limited to date. Furthermore, no research has explored this topic from the perspective of UK based counselling psychologists. The overarching purpose of this study was therefore to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. *Method and analyses:* A mixed methods design was employed. A preliminary quantitative survey phase was followed by the priority stage of the research, in which qualitative interviews were conducted with six members of the counselling psychology profession with at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice. Qualitative data were analysed using tools from the grounded theory approach. Connection of the two phases of research occurred at participant selection for the qualitative phase and in the interpretation phase. *Findings:* Quantitative findings were limited; however, comparative to previous studies using the same measure, members of the counselling psychology profession have lower levels of social justice interest and commitment. Qualitative findings highlighted two core categories within the data: 'Counselling psychologists' understanding of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it' and 'Counselling psychologists' reflections on social justice action'. *Conclusions:* The qualitative findings extend our understanding of counselling psychologists' social justice interest and commitment and aid interpretation of the initial quantitative findings. Participants defined social justice in a way which is largely consistent with the theoretical literature but reported some difficulties with this which may be due to training in the area. Results relating to social justice action indicate that whilst some UK-based counselling psychologists are acting on their social justice values, there are numerous issues which potentially limit this. Recommendations for theory, further research and practice are discussed.

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## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.



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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Background and introduction to the study**

Traditionally, psychology has taken an intra-psychic approach, whereby problems or difficulties are defined in terms of the individual; explanations which are rooted in society are typically excluded, and interventions to address presenting issues are focused on an individual level (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthorn & Siddiquee, 2011; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Prilleltensky, Docecki, Frieden & Wong, 2007). In contrast, a number of authors have observed that the work of psychological therapists does not take place in a vacuum. For example, Blair (2009, p. 7) notes that “[p]sychological therapy takes place in a social, political, economic, and ideological context”. Consistent with this, perspectives offered by critical and community psychological approaches have suggested that explanations of human distress need to be more broadly rooted than purely in individual factors, and effective psychological interventions need to be directed at the community, organizational and societal level (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997).

Counselling psychology, a branch of applied psychology, has been said to have a humanistic ethic and value base at its core (Cooper, 2009; Gillon, 2007; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). Research conducted in the United Kingdom has found that counselling psychologists consider themselves potential outsiders or mavericks in applied psychology (Moore & Rae, 2009). A definition of counselling psychology is considered below. Consistent with the position of critical and community psychology, in the most recent *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* published in the UK, Kagan, Tindall and Robinson (2010) suggested that counselling psychology should move away from an individualist focus and embrace social and cultural explanations of distress and broader psychological interventions. They describe how counselling psychologists might act on the humanistic values of the profession by incorporating aspects of community psychology into their practice. One of the key authors in the field of critical community psychology, Isaac Prilleltensky, has described social justice as one of the five main values endorsed by community psychology, and argues that “without an even distribution of social goods, other

basic values, needs, and rights cannot be fulfilled” (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997, p. 178).

This thesis presents a research project which was designed to explore the place of social justice in counselling psychology in the UK. As will be seen in later chapters, there has been an increasing level of interest in social justice in the international counselling psychology community (particularly the United States), demonstrated by a wide range of theoretical and conceptual literature and a smaller but developing pool of empirical literature. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research considering the concept of social justice from the view-point of members of the counselling psychology profession. Furthermore, no previous research of this kind has been conducted in the UK, and the majority of the theoretical and conceptual published papers have come from the US counselling psychology profession. There are perhaps reasons to question whether there might be differences in the place of social justice in the counselling psychology professions across these two geographical regions, including for example the different levels of development in counselling psychology in the UK and the US, and the different social climates for example with reference to the provision of the welfare state. Due to the focus of the project there is an international flavour to the literature discussed; because of the dominance of US literature, the reader should assume unless otherwise stated that the literature referred to comes from the US counselling psychology profession. Where literature originates from other regions, for example the UK counselling psychology profession, I have made this explicit for the reader in order to aid critical contextualisation.

The overarching purpose of the present research was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of UK-based counselling psychologists. A participant-selection variant of the explanatory sequential mixed methods design was adopted. The purpose of the mixed methods design was sampling and complementarity. An initial quantitative survey phase using the Social Issues Questionnaire was conducted which had two objectives (SIQ; Miller et al., 2009). Firstly, it had the purpose of sampling for the latter qualitative phase, and secondly, preliminary survey data were collected to give an indication of the levels of social justice interest and commitment of a sample of members of the counselling psychology profession in the UK. A second, qualitative phase was considered the priority in the research, and had the

purpose of exploring a subsample of participants' social justice interest and commitment in more depth. Specifically, those with at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice were interviewed regarding their understanding of social justice and how their commitment to social justice manifests in action. The quantitative and qualitative phases were connected at two points. The stages were connected at the point of sampling, and then findings were integrated during the interpretation phase of the research (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). In later chapters I will elaborate on this brief introduction to the research, however initially it is necessary to introduce two key terms used throughout the thesis: 'counselling psychology' and 'social justice'.

## **1.2. Defining key terms**

### ***Counselling psychology***

Counselling psychology has a relatively brief history as a formally recognised discipline of applied psychology in the UK (Hanley, Sefi, Cutts & Lennie, 2013; Walsh, Frankland & Cross, 2004). Orlans and Van Scoyoc (2009) have described that outside of the UK counselling psychology exists as a profession to at least some extent in ten further locations, including the US, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, South Africa, Israel, Portugal and Germany. There are a number of similarities across these different counselling psychology professions (Pelling, 2004). However, due to the varying degrees of development of the professions and the individual differences in countries, one might struggle to define counselling psychology in a way which captures the cultural variation. Suffice it to say here that Pelling (2004, p. 241) describes how prevention, a focus on positive client attributes, and working with clients both "on the normal end of the pathology continuum" and those from "more abnormal populations" are commonalities across a number of these counselling psychology professions. Within the current project, as the literature predominantly comes from the US and the study was located in the UK counselling psychology field it is useful to look at definitions of counselling psychology in these two countries, which as stated above, may have both similarities and differences.

Counselling psychology in the UK is “full of paradoxes and challenges” and authors within the discipline have struggled to give a clear definition of it (Kasket & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 21). Recent research suggests that counselling psychology rejects the “ultimate truth as declared by the medical model” (Hemsley, 2013, p. 20). As aforementioned, the profession has been said to have a humanistic ethic and value base at its core (Cooper, 2009; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). It has also been described as taking a stance which is sensitive to one’s individual experience, and as valuing a wide range of therapeutic approaches (Gillon, 2007). The profession has developed out of counselling; psychologists who had additional training in counselling and psychotherapy created a special interest group in counselling psychology in the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1979 (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). This special interest group developed into a section in 1982, and the formal Division of Counselling Psychology was created in 1994 (Hanley et al., 2013). From a UK perspective, we might then look to the BPS for assistance in defining counselling psychology. On the Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP) website counselling psychology is described as follows:

Counselling Psychology is a branch of applied professional psychology. It has its origins in the UK within the humanistic movement with influences from counselling psychology in the USA and European Psychotherapy on the one hand; and the science of psychology (cognitive, developmental, and social) on the other. Counselling psychologists work with people in a variety of settings from severe and enduring mental health services to those whom life has challenged and who are struggling to adapt to these changes. The focus is on working with an individually tailored psychological formulation of an individual’s difficulties to improve psychological functioning and well-being. Counselling psychologists understand diagnosis and the medical context to mental health problems and at the same time work with the individual’s unique subjective psychological experience to empower their recovery (“What is counselling psychology”, n.d., para. 1)

Counselling psychology in the US is a more established profession than in the UK; the first training programmes were accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) in the 1950s (Leong & Leach, 2007). In contrast to some of the

other locations where counselling psychology has a presence, Pelling (2004, p. 241) describes counselling psychology in the US as having a “relatively long history and relatively stable existence”. The APA provides us with both a lengthy discussion of the parameters of the profession, as well as a brief definition of counselling psychology in the US, which is as follows:

Counseling psychology is a general practice and health service–provider specialty in professional psychology. It focuses on personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span and on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, developmental and organizational concerns. Counseling psychology centers on typical or normal developmental issues as well as atypical or disordered development as it applies to human experience from individual, family, group, systems, and organizational perspectives. Counseling psychologists help people with physical, emotional, and mental disorders improve well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, and resolve crises. In addition, practitioners in this professional specialty provide assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychopathology (APA & Lichtenberg, 1999, p. 589)

Within the current project these two definitions serve as the understanding of counselling psychology adopted. Where appropriate I have made apparent whether I am referring to the US or UK counselling psychology professions.

### *Social justice*

To an academic social scientist, justice is a nebulous but far from negligible concept that underlies the operating system of individuals, families, tribes, communities, and nations both separately and collectively (Taylor, 2003, p. 211)

Whilst in its broadest sense, justice can be said to mean ‘fairness’ (Vasquez, 2012) the specific meaning of social justice has been widely debated and discussed. It has been extensively discussed in the discipline of political philosophy, for example by John Rawls, who postulates two principles of social justice which he argues would be accepted by “free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests” (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). These two principles are as follows:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty from others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls, 1971, p. 60)

He states that these principles are aligned with a more general conception of social justice:

All social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage. (Rawls, 1971, p. 62)

More recently in the field of political philosophy, Miller (2001) defines social justice as the equitable distribution of valued and disvalued goods within a society. This includes resources such as income and wealth, employment, education and health care. These comments give an indication of the broad meaning of the term social justice. However, because part of the focus of the current research project was on exploring how counselling psychologists understand social justice, I consider the definition and understanding of the term social justice within the literature review. Nevertheless, a detailed review of the political philosophy literature is beyond the scope of the current thesis, and the discussion of social justice within the subsequent literature review will focus primarily on social justice as seen within a psychology, psychotherapy or counselling perspective.

### **1.3. Personal interest in the topic**

When choosing the topic for my thesis as part of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology I decided on the area of social justice in counselling psychology for various reasons. I am interested more broadly in the identity of the profession of counselling psychology, in part because of my reading of the various struggles and attempts to define the profession within the literature, and in part through questioning my own interest in and attachment to the profession. More specifically, I come to counselling psychology with a personal interest in social and,



broadly speaking, political issues. At the time of writing I have been a volunteer in various charity settings for seven years, and, although being myself from what I perceive to be a privileged middle class background, I have been witness to the impact of inequalities in society, discrimination, unemployment, and poverty on both individuals I have worked with and those I have known in a personal setting. My personal interest was therefore sparked when reading about the “social justice agenda” (Speight & Vera, 2004. p. 111) in counselling psychology, and my initial reading of the literature developed into the research project presented within this thesis. I outline my personal interest not only to identify my potential biases and presuppositions, and my positioning with the topic, but also in order to discuss how these factors might have impacted the present research and how I attempted to manage this in the research process (Kasket, 2012). I therefore elaborate on this subject in sections 3.4.2(ii) and 3.4.2(vi).

#### **1.4. Overview of the structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters including this introductory chapter. Following this chapter in the literature review I review the literature to date in the relevant areas of social justice and counselling psychology, with reference to the concept of social justice itself, the presence of social justice in allied professions, and the prior theoretical and research literature looking at social justice within counselling psychology. This includes a discussion of social justice action within counselling psychology. I end the second chapter by setting out the research questions which have served as the focus of the project. Following this, in the third chapter, I give details of the methodological approach taken, outlining the epistemological positioning, methodology adopted and methods used at each stage of the project, with reference to appropriate standards of validity and ethical reflections. Within the findings chapter I report the results of the project in relation to the research questions posed. Finally, in the discussion chapter, I reflect on those findings in relation to the prior literature, with reference to recommendations arising from the study, limitations of the research, and suggested avenues for future research to explore.

## **1.5. Chapter summary**

In this first chapter I have aimed to give a broad introduction to the following thesis. I have outlined that this research aimed to add to the growing literature on social justice within the profession of counselling psychology. I have defined the key term ‘counselling psychology’ with reference both to international and national definitions. I have also made reference to definitions of social justice, which will be expanded on further from a counselling and psychology perspective in subsequent chapters. Finally I have introduced my personal interest in the topic of study and outlined the structure of the thesis.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Within this chapter I ground the present research project in the relevant theoretical and research literature. A literature review aims to bring together literature in a given area, summarizing the salient points in a single document (Harden & Thomas, 2005). The goals of the literature review include integrating and critically analyzing the literature, as well as identifying central issues, and any weaknesses of the research, or any gaps in the knowledge base (Randolph, 2009). This review brings together literature found predominantly over the course of my three year Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Citations have, in the main part, been found by searching electronic databases of journal articles. The electronic databases searched have included, but not been limited to: PsycInfo; ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts); CINAHL Plus (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature); Google Scholar; and Medline. Additional sources have been found through further searching in published books in the relevant subject areas, as well as searching the reference lists of identified sources.

There are five sections to the core of the literature review. Initially, in section 2.2, I focus on social justice and discuss both theoretical and conceptual definitions within the relevant fields, and prior research findings on how individuals define social justice. Following this, in section 2.3 I introduce critical approaches to psychology, theory and practices and its relationship to counselling psychology. In section 2.4, I then consider social justice in two allied professions: clinical psychology and critical community psychology. Following this, in section 2.5, I introduce the literature around social justice within counselling psychology, initially focusing on the background, the relevance of social justice to counselling psychology, and related concepts in counselling psychology. I then move on in section 2.6 to a consideration of translating social justice values into practice. Within this I review the literature around social justice action in counselling psychology, including literature around potential ways of acting on social justice values, research assessing 'real life' practice of social justice, as well as potential difficulties and problems associated with counselling psychologists engaging in social justice action. Having considered

these areas of the literature I end the chapter by outlining the research questions addressed by this project in section 2.7.

## **2.2. Social justice**

As described in the introduction, due to the focus of the project and space constraints this review will focus on a consideration of the literature looking at social justice specifically within the fields of counselling and psychology. This is divided into two sections. In counselling psychology at least, a complete definition of social justice has been “elusive”, with authors largely focusing on the key elements which they consider to be important rather than formulating a precise statement of what social justice means (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins & Mason, 2009, p. 95). Initially therefore I discuss the elements of social justice which have been discussed in the theoretical and conceptual literature, in order to elucidate how social justice has been broadly defined within the counselling psychology field. Following on from this, I review the small amount of prior research which has considered how individuals define social justice.

### ***2.2.1. Elements of social justice***

In a recent publication within the social justice literature in the US counselling profession, Chung and Bemak (2012) give a broad indication of what they mean by social justice:

the concept of social justice when considered within the context of counselling and psychotherapy, is based on the idea that society gives individuals and groups *fair treatment and an equal share of benefits, resources, and opportunities*. (p. 26, emphasis added)

This echoes the idea seen in many definitions of social justice which relate it to the concept of fairness (from the UK, Kagan et al., 2011; and from the US, Fouad, Gerstein & Toporek, 2006). The definitions rarely go on to elaborate on what is meant specifically by the term ‘fair’ however. Chung and Bemak (2012) also state that social justice is about an equal share of resources. This can be distinguished from many definitions of social justice in the literature, which regard the equitable

distribution of resources as important (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Kagan et al., 2011; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Fouad et al., 2006). The distinction drawn here is between dividing resources so that each individual has exactly the same amount, therefore an *equal* distribution; and a division of resources which is 'fair' and therefore *equitable* (Crethar, Rivera & Nash, 2008). The latter scenario might best be illustrated by considering a situation where an individual who has a physical disability is provided with additional resources in order to participate in society to the same degree as someone without the physical disability (for example by providing a guide dog); therefore the distribution is based on the need of the individual rather than on equality in a pure sense. In definitions of social justice this notion of an equitable (or equal) distribution has been used to refer to the following 'resources' or 'goods': power and obligations in society (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997), opportunities for individuals (Chung & Bemak, 2012), income, education, and good health care (Lewis, 2010). These aspects of the definition of social justice appear tied to the concept of distributive justice, which can be seen as "how social goods and individual responsibilities are distributed within society" (Lewis, 2010, p. 147). In his discussion of social justice, Lewis distinguishes distributive justice from procedural justice. Procedural justice is defined as the degree to which the procedures for distributing in society are themselves fair. He also distinguishes a third type of justice, interactional justice, which involves how people treat each other and the degree to which interactions are considered fair. He argues that interactional justice is the area in which counselling psychologists have the most to contribute (Lewis, 2010).

Taylor (2003), in a paper from New Zealand, puts forward the argument that justice should be considered as a basic human need. Drawing on personal experience, he argues that "the topic of justice is so fundamental that a case could be made for it to be construed as a basic human need" (Taylor, 2003, p.216). Within his argument, Taylor (2003) makes reference to the work of Abraham Maslow. In his theory of human motivation Maslow (1943) argues that human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. The hierarchy which he outlines begins with the most urgent of needs and works toward the least: the physiological needs; the safety needs; the love, affection and belonging needs; the esteem needs; and the need for

self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Therefore the need for social justice is not explicitly listed in the hierarchy of needs. Nevertheless, Taylor (2003) points out that Maslow warns of the consequences of injustice in his work. Further to this suggestion I would argue that the emphasis on the physiological needs as the first needs in the hierarchy ties in with the discussions of social justice seen above. For example, Maslow emphasizes that “[f]or the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food” (Maslow, 1943, p. 374). Considering the emphasis in definitions of social justice on a fair access to resources, in this case food, Maslow’s hierarchy does at least seem to capture some aspects of social justice as a need.

A widely cited definition of social justice within counselling psychology was set out by Goodman et al. (2004):

we conceptualize the *social justice work* of counseling psychologists as scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination (p. 795, emphasis added).

As indicated by the emphasis added on the initial part of the quote, this definition is explicitly focused on the social justice work of counselling psychologists rather than defining social justice as such. This is consistent with the idea that social justice can be seen as both the end goal of social justice work and the process of working towards social justice (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012). Lewis (2010) provides a critique of the Goodman et al. (2004) definition, arguing that it is “perhaps overly restrictive” (Lewis, 2010, p. 146) as it focuses purely on macro level change (of values, structures, policies etc.). He proposes what he argues is a more inclusive definition of social justice, which is as follows:

The ultimate objective of social justice involves the fair and equitable distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources between individuals and between groups of individuals within a given society, and the establishment of

relations within this society such that all individuals are treated with an equal degree of respect and dignity (Lewis, 2010, p. 146).

The statements by both Goodman and colleagues and Lewis indicate a number of additional elements of social justice. For example, Goodman and colleagues refer to the “tools of self-determination” (p. 795) which appears to refer to the idea of empowering individuals or groups to retain their own autonomy. This is consistent with the idea of the value of liberation seen in the critical community psychology literature in the UK. Kagan et al. (2011, p. 30) argue that a liberation perspective “brings in the affected, the victims, as actors and not just passive recipients of prevention or treatment programmes”. Whilst self-determination has elsewhere been listed as value separate from social justice (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997), the Goodman et al. (2004) definition brings self-determination into a social justice perspective. Kagan et al. (2011) contend that in order to be serious about social justice we need to be serious about people’s right to self-determination, which appears consistent with the inclusion of a right to self-determination within our understanding of social justice.

Another theme which can be seen across writings regarding social justice is power. Chung and Bemak (2012) refer to the use of power by individuals in society, and argue that people who occupy positions of power can perpetuate social injustices, either through intentional or unintentional means. Authors have also often referred to oppression when discussing injustice. Prilleltensky (1997) describes oppression as power imbalances which operate at inter and intra-personal levels as well as the social, national and international levels. Oppressed groups of society, such as women and members of low socio-economic classes, have less power in relation to their non oppressed counterparts (Speight & Vera, 2004). Calls for social justice have outlined that working with the oppressed groups of society in order to help address the power imbalances and inequities in society are of fundamental importance (Speight & Vera, 2004). Directly connected to this, one aspect of social justice which is emphasized in the literature is empowerment. The term, whilst being poorly defined in the literature, is “fundamentally about gaining power”, and refers to a powerless person setting a goal of, and acting towards, increasing his or her power (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010, p. 647). Empowerment is highlighted as an important part of social

justice (Crethar et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2004). For example, Crethar and Winterowd (2012) describe the importance of empowering individuals to challenge inequities and injustices in their communities. Indeed, Kiselica and Robinson (2001) describe the purpose of social action as being to increase ones' sense of personal power (see also 'power-sensitised counselling' in the UK literature: Spong, 2012; Spong & Hollanders, 2003).

It is common to see social justice defined in relation to what is socially unjust. For example, Chung and Bemak (2012) in their attempt to define social justice quickly refer to what social injustice is:

The goal of social justice work is to eliminate unfair treatment, inequities, and injustices in order to create a society where *all* members – regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, age, or other distinguishing characteristic – are on the same playing field (p. 36).

Although there is a wealth of literature which does grapple with defining social justice, I have also found that the term is often used without reference to the author's intended meaning, which can prove problematic for any detailed analysis of the literature. This is not something which has gone unnoticed by other authors. Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002) have pointed out in the community psychology literature, where it is a common topic of discussion, that the meaning of social justice is widely assumed rather than explicitly formulated. Although social justice may be a term which is difficult to define (Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010; Kazemi & Törnblom, 2008 (Swedish publication)), Lewis (2010) points out that this lack of specificity can prove problematic for developing training programmes in social justice in counselling psychology. I would argue that it also makes discussion about the issue in general difficult; the lack of specificity may mean that authors can speak at cross purposes without being aware of this.



### ***2.2.2. How do individuals understand social justice?***

Todd and Rufa (2012) comment that whilst literature in the areas of philosophy and psychology can help to understand what social justice is, it is also important to consider what people think social justice means. Only a handful of studies have been identified which address this. Olsen, Reid, Threadgill-Goldson, Riffe and Ryan (2013) ran focus groups with social workers and found that, on the whole, participants' definitions of social justice were compatible with the theoretical literature in the area. For example, participants reflected on the importance of fairness and equality of opportunities and resources. Nevertheless they also commented that participants' definitions were "vague and broad" (p. 38) and that there was no consensus on what social justice meant. The authors concluded that this perhaps reflected the lack of concrete definitions of social justice presented within social work training (Olsen et al., 2013).

Todd and Rufa (2012) conducted a grounded theory project, interviewing self-identifying Christians to investigate how they understand and define social justice. Participants generally presented a structural understanding of social justice and described injustice resulting from problems with systems, but also described seeing social justice as about meeting individual basic needs. Participants made reference to unequal distributions of power, goods and resources across society. They also connected social justice to human dignity and rights and reflected on treating individuals as humans and providing basic freedoms and rights. Findings indicated that the participants also connected social justice to their religious responsibility. Whilst these findings are illuminating with regards to defining social justice, and are consistent with some of the theoretical literature described above, it is unclear whether the individuals sampled would have similar constructions of social justice to for example those in the counselling psychology field. As the authors themselves point out in the paper, the findings are potentially "limited to a Midwestern Christian and Catholic population" (p. 15). It has previously been suggested that Christians may have a particular connection to social justice (Edwards, 2012). Research from within the counselling psychology field has suggested that there may be a complex relationship between religion and social justice, with participants both suggesting that religion and spirituality can be motivators of social justice work and that religion

may have a potentially negative impact on motivation to engage in social justice work (Beer, Greene, Spanierman & Todd, 2012). This particular piece of research therefore may not necessarily be able to inform us about for example a non-religious understanding of social justice (Todd & Rufa, 2012).

One study has been identified which directly addresses how counselling psychologists understand social justice (Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010). The researchers asked trainee counselling psychologists based in the US about how they defined social justice as part of a larger study addressing social justice training for counselling psychologists. Results indicated that there were four major components in counselling psychologists' definitions of social justice. Firstly, participants suggested that social justice has an emphasis on promoting social equality across people and places, in terms of access to resources for example. This is interesting when considered alongside the theoretical literature and the discussion of equality or equity seen above. The second component was an active attempt to reduce current inequalities in society. Thirdly, the participants suggested social justice involved recognition of the context of society and the factors which would form part of a 'just society'. Finally, social justice was both seen as an ideal to strive toward, and as something outcome oriented and behaviourally based. These findings again are consistent with some of the theoretical literature above. Nevertheless, the authors noted that participants struggled to define the term and concluded that the "lack of social justice training in academic programs may make it challenging for trainees to define this concept" (Singh, Hofsess et al. 2010, p. 785). Research does suggest that an understanding of social justice develops over time and that education and teaching are important factors in this development: Caldwell and Vera (2010) considered critical incidents in the development of a commitment to social justice and found that the counselling psychologists in their study reported that one of the ways in which such critical incidents facilitated a commitment to social justice was through increasing their theoretical and conceptual understanding of social justice. A further potential limitation of the research by Singh and colleagues is that they used an online survey design, which did not allow the researchers to follow up any aspects of participants' responses. This may have been particularly important with regards to the challenging question of defining social justice. In conclusion, there is a lack of

research which investigates what counselling psychologists understand social justice to mean, with only one empirical paper found addressing this topic (Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010).

### **2.3. Critical approaches to psychology**

In this section of my literature review I introduce critical approaches to psychology, theories and practices and their relationship to counselling psychology. Within this, I initially reflect on what critical psychology is, and its relationship to mainstream psychology. I then discuss the connection between critical psychological approaches and the profession of counselling psychology. Finally, I reflect on my own role as a counselling psychologist in developing this research project, and highlight some of the tensions and issues involved in this, particularly with regards to the issue of power.

Critical psychology has been defined as:

At its most general level, critical psychology is a response to an inadequate theory or practice in the field. A psychologist decides that current theories and practices are, at best, not helpful. At worst, they may harm disenfranchised members of society, such as women, individuals with different ethnic backgrounds and so on (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997, pp. 68-69).

Critical approaches to psychological theory and practice therefore present a challenge to the status quo, and adopt a critical stance towards some of the traditional elements of psychology. They take as a starting point the radical and political approaches to traditional psychology (Parker, 1999; Totton, 2000). Indeed, critical approaches to psychology are considered to be a political endeavour (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997), because they recognise the inherently political nature of psychology, given it's positioning in society (Parker, 2007). Additionally, a critical psychology perspective recognizes the value-laden nature of psychology and, rather than adopting an objective stance, promotes a set of key values. The values often cited include caring and compassion; health; self-determination and participation; human diversity; and social justice (Prilleltensky, 1997; Prilleltensky

& Nelson, 1997). Critical psychologists argue that psychology should consider not only wellness or well-being, but also fairness or justice, and suggest that current psychological discourses focus overwhelmingly on wellness without reference to its association with fairness (Prilleltensky, 2013). There are therefore strong links between social justice and a critical approach to psychology.

It is useful to consider the connection between critical psychology and traditional psychological approaches, theories and practices. As indicated by the name, critical psychology adopts a critical perspective to psychological theories and practices. Kagan et al. (2011) explain that the use of the word 'critical' indicates an approach which seeks to redefine or rework a discipline by appealing to another framework, and looking beyond accepted explanations. As an approach it challenges both the dominant societal values and institutions and the mainstream psychology profession which is seen to reinforce these (Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). Critical psychology's stance regarding traditional psychological approaches is illustrated by the following quote:

Because psychology's values, assumptions, and norms have supported society's dominant institutions since its birth as a field of study, the field's mainstream contributes to social injustice and thwarts the promotion of human welfare (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997 p. 4)

Critical psychological approaches are therefore deeply connected to mainstream psychological approaches: "critical psychology and the status quo exist in a yin-yang relationship" (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997, p. 69). Mainstream psychology provides the 'status quo' teachings of psychology, including perspectives on theories, research methodologies and assumptions, and critical psychology then challenges that status quo (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997). Traditional approaches have been criticized from a critical psychology perspective for being either unhelpful or for causing harm to the public, in particular those from marginalized populations (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997). Psychology has been critiqued for emphasizing an individualistic understanding of distress, which risks underestimating the impact of the social context on the individual (Spong, 2012). As Prilleltensky et al. (2007, p. 35) state:

If mental health is inextricably intertwined with the health of the society as a whole, there is no justification to always refer social concerns elsewhere, such as welfare agencies or political parties.

Critical psychological approaches therefore present a significant challenge to the mainstream profession of psychology. This challenge is levied against both psychological practices of therapy, theory and research, and psychologists are challenged to change their practices in all of these areas. For example, Parker (2006) makes reference to the critical psychological approach to psychological research, commenting that critical psychology challenges the notion that psychology as a field of study can be a science, because scientific methods are unsuitable for studying the mind (Parker, 2006). In his book *The Trouble with Therapy*, Morrall (2008) argues that the practice of psychological therapy is abusive because it disempowers individuals and inappropriately wields and misuses social power. Examples of critical approaches to psychological practice involve giving voice to people, particularly those who have been negatively impacted by psychology at some time. Parker (2006) describes several examples of this including the development of community groups such as the Hearing Voices Network in the UK. The applied psychology discipline of critical community psychology applies some of the perspectives of critical approaches to psychology to its work with communities (Kagan et al., 2011; see section 2.4.2, below). As a critical approach challenges the notion that someone's problems are rooted solely in the individual, critical community psychology shifts the focus away from treating the individual and their presenting problem using an therapeutic approach working with the individual alone, towards working with the community and society as a whole (Kagan et al., 2011; Thatcher & Manktelow, 2007).

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, counselling psychology in the UK has been aligned with a humanistic model and has commonly rejected the position prescribed by a medical model (Cooper, 2009; Hemsley, 2013). Similarly, Parker (2006) reflects on the humanistic critique of the medical model and 'scientific psychology' within critical psychology. It might therefore be argued that there are shared ideas or similarities between a critical perspective to psychology and the profession of counselling psychology. Indeed, Kagan et al. (2010) make this

connection and describe what they refer to as “community counselling psychology” (p. 485). They urge counselling psychologists to move away from traditional individualistic models of treatment, towards a community based approach. In the US the relationship between critical approaches to psychology and counselling psychology has also been made through the connection of community psychology, and the two allied disciplines are strongly aligned (Todd & Rufa, 2012).

Having introduced critical psychology and discussed the connection between this critical perspective and both mainstream psychology and counselling psychology, I now move on to consider my role as a counselling psychologist in developing this research. A critical perspective to psychology encourages psychologists to be transparent and announce our own values and emerging moral conceptions (Prilleltensky, 1997). It is therefore important within this project to reflect on my experience in developing the research, which I have aimed to do throughout this thesis. A critical perspective to psychology also encourages us to engage in self-examination particularly with regards to our position of power as psychologists (Steffen & Hanley, 2013). This thesis presents work undertaken as part of a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. I have therefore been training and developing my own identity as a counselling psychologist and understanding of the profession and my work as a psychologist whilst conducting the research. Due to my role as a trainee psychologist, I have occupied a position of power both in relation to the individuals I have been working with therapeutically, and in my role as a researcher in relation to the individuals who have participated in the study. I have also been working with individuals who are suffering as a result of injustice and oppression. The thesis which follows is necessarily influenced by my role as an individual, and as a psychologist practitioner and researcher. Furthermore, it has been influenced by the powerful role which I have held in designing and developing the research. Due to the focus of the project on social justice (which as we saw in section 2.2. above, encapsulates both issues of power and equality) and the connection to this critical psychological approach, there was a tension present within me in developing a project in which I held such a position of power (the tensions around my power as a researcher are elaborated on in section 5.6.3, below). Given the discussions within this section of the literature review, from a critical perspective it is useful at this

stage to be transparent about the fact that this project is necessarily influenced by these factors.

## **2.4. Social justice in allied professions**

Within this section I present a review of the literature on social justice in professions which are considered allied to counselling psychology. Two professions are discussed: critical community psychology and clinical psychology. In addition to the two professions discussed here, counselling has engaged significantly with the matter of social justice (Lee & Hipolito-Delgado, 2007). However, within the literature, references are often made to social justice for counsellors/ counselling psychologists and the literature in these two professions appears to have developed alongside each other (Constantine et al., 2007). As a result of this, sources located within the counselling world have been drawn upon to inform subsequent sections of the literature review which focus on counselling psychology, and therefore counselling is not considered separately within this section of the literature review. Needless to say I could have chosen to discuss other allied professions, such as those of social work (e.g. Hawkins, Fook & Ryan, 2001), or education (e.g. Taysum & Gunter, 2008). Nevertheless, a comprehensive review of allied professions is not necessary here, and space does not permit it. Hopefully the two areas discussed will give an indication of the relevance and understanding of social justice in similar professions, before I move on to review the prior research which has specifically considered social justice in counselling psychology.

### ***2.4.1. Clinical psychology and social justice***

Within the UK at least, the profession of clinical psychology is arguably one of counselling psychology's closest neighbours. Both professions are registered by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC), and they share a large number of the competencies set out by the HCPC. There has been some discussion of social justice in the clinical psychology literature. In the US, Albee (1998, p. 192) wrote that clinical psychology has "sold our souls to the Devil – the medical model". He argued that clinical psychology training programmes did not provide trainees with an understanding of the real aetiology of distress, and instead of teaching rooted in the

medical model of mental illness, clinical psychologists should be taught about social justice and injustice in order to learn about the consequences of such injustice. Furthermore, he stated that clinical psychologists should “[b]ecome politically active” (p.193). As result of voices such as George Albee in the profession of clinical psychology the organisation Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) was created, which is an organisation of psychologists who are committed to using psychological knowledge and skills to promote social justice (Sloan & Toporek, 2007). Nevertheless, PsySR is not an explicitly clinical psychology organisation; it encompasses the wider field of psychology as a whole. Within clinical psychology specifically, in the UK Harding, Brown, May and Hayward (2007) discuss the notion of being socially inclusive in practice, and draw on community psychology literature to suggest that clinical psychology needs to broaden its approach to include wider scale interventions, as well as involving service users in a more active and collaborative way in decision making.

Only one relevant citation has been found which considers socio-political issues with members of the clinical psychology profession. Thompson (2007) used both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the relationship between clinical psychology and ideas from critical community psychology. Trainee clinical psychologists in the UK were asked to rate the relevance of a number of statements about critical community psychology to clinical psychology. They were also asked to provide qualitative comments on their ratings. Statements included “acknowledging and understanding the impact of economic factors on suffering”; “working towards a just world”; and “challenging governments and other institutions that perpetuate social injustice”. A factor analysis of the quantitative data was conducted and qualitative data analysis used an abbreviated grounded theory framework. Findings suggested that radical socio-political ideas, such as challenging the prevalence of capitalism and individualism, were seen as the least relevant to clinical psychology, while core socio-political ideas, including working towards a just world, and identifying and working against oppression, were seen as relevant or very relevant to the field. Thompson concluded that socio-political ideas were seen as relevant to the field. However, the qualitative data suggested that participants had doubts and questions about how socio-political values could be acted upon within their roles as



psychologists (Thompson, 2007). This piece of research provides us with a useful indication of the attitudes of trainee clinical psychologists in the UK, however the research in this area is limited and it is at this stage difficult to draw conclusions regarding the importance of social justice to the profession of clinical psychology.

#### ***2.4.2. Critical community psychology and social justice***

As referred to earlier, in section 2.2 on critical psychological approaches, community psychology is an applied psychology which puts into practice some of the ethos and values of critical psychology, and is described as “the applied psychology of working with communities” (Kagan et al., 2011. p. 19). In the US counselling psychology has been described as being the “sister discipline” of community psychology (Todd & Rufa, 2012, p. 2). Community psychology in the UK is often described as being distinct and separate from ‘mainstream psychology’, and the discipline is cited as being “inherently political” (Goodley & Lawthom, 2005, p. 136). Although in 1997, Prilleltensky and Nelson suggested that of community psychology’s 5 main values (health; caring and compassion; self-determination and participation; human diversity; and social justice), social justice was not looked at enough, recent texts in community psychology cite social justice as one of the key pursuits and values embedded in the area. For example, Kagan et al. (2011) emphasise this in their BPS text book *Critical Community Psychology*, noting that critical community psychology is an ethical project, which contributes to a wider movement for a just society. Across the community psychology literature, the term ‘social justice’ is frequently used and emphasised as a core tenet of the field:

The field of community psychology has a deep and abiding interest in social justice, with numerous texts and articles naming social justice as a central value to the field (Todd & Rufa, 2012, p. 1).

Community psychology has, as a discipline, emphasised the importance of wider community interventions (Kagan et al., 2011), and has further applied their principles to the area of research, for example by emphasising power-sharing in the research process with participants acting as consultants in the process (e.g. Duckett, Kagan & Sixsmith, 2010).

## **2.5. Social justice in counselling psychology**

Authors in counselling psychology have suggested that there is a “rich and vibrant exploration of social justice and advocacy that has emerged within the profession” (Singh, Hofsess et al., p. 768). Having discussed the relevant literature considering the definition of social justice and reviewed social justice within allied professions, in this section of the chapter I begin to explore the literature around social justice in counselling psychology. I consider firstly the background and an historical perspective on social justice within counselling psychology, with reference to writings on social explanations of distress. I then reflect on the relation of social justice to the multicultural and feminist counselling movements. Following this, I explore the connection between social justice and both counselling psychology as a profession and counselling psychologists as individuals.

### ***2.5.1. History and development of a social justice perspective in counselling psychology***

Aldarondo (2007) describes the way in which justice and equality, amongst others, are “foundational values...embraced by the mental health professionals” (p. 4). He argues that there is a rich history of social justice values and practice within the mental health professions. Drawing on literature across the professions of social work, psychoanalysis, counselling professions (including counselling psychology), psychiatry, and family therapy, a case is made for the idea that there are significant social justice legacies within these professions (Aldarondo, 2007). Within counselling psychology literature, there appears to be a consensus that the profession has been talking about social justice since its inception (Fouad et al., 2006; Bradley, Werth & Hastings, 2012). Fouad et al. (2006) trace the profession’s involvement in social justice, and describe how in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s counselling psychology was involved in social justice work. They then discuss how in the 1980s and 90s there was a slight quietening of this movement, with the emphasis on managed care pushing it to one side. Despite this they go on to illustrate how since the late 1990s the engagement with social justice issues in counselling psychology has been re-energized (Fouad et al., 2006).

As a result of this recent energy there has been an increasing amount of theoretical literature in the area of social justice in counselling psychology (Goodman et al., 2004). The fourth US National Counselling Psychology Conference, which took place in Houston in the March of 2001, listed one of the four main purposes of the conference as: “to identify ways that counseling psychologists work toward social justice by making a difference in the lives of students, clients, and communities” (Fouad et al., 2004, p. 16). At the end of the conference, 88% of attendees at a town-hall meeting voted to support a social advocacy agenda in the profession (Goodman et al., 2004). Following the conference, a section in the publication *The Counseling Psychologist* was dedicated to social justice (Carter, 2003). The social justice movement has strong ties with the multicultural counselling agenda in counselling psychology, which also developed significantly in recent years (Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke & Vasquez, 1999; Crethar et al., 2008). Indeed, the social justice agenda is seen by some as a broadening of multicultural counselling (Vera & Speight, 2003). I will consider the multicultural counselling movement below, in section 2.4.2.

The interest in social justice in counselling psychology may perhaps be traced back to writings on socio-cultural explanations of distress and criticisms of the medical, individualist model (e.g. Albee, 1969). Proponents of this perspective suggest that focusing treatment on an individual level and subscribing to a medical model misses the vital connection between the society we live in and our well-being (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). For example, Prilleltensky et al. (2007) describe how the helping professions have traditionally focused on helping individuals on the personal and relational levels rather than on a collective level. They suggest that most traditional services are overly focused on providing services to individual people, small groups or families, arguing that approaches have operated mainly with person-based interventions. Kagan et al. (2011), writing in the UK, suggest that psychology’s traditional emphasis on the individual is unsurprising considering its development alongside the social system of capitalism:

Here, individual people were freed from the traditional bonds of obligation, membership, responsibility, duty, location, and increasingly from adherence to the traditional systems of ideas that defined who they were and where they

would normally remain. In this new ‘world turned upside down’ people were seen as separate disconnected ‘atoms’, free to enter into contracts with one another (but normally with the owner of the means of production), in arrangements that could be as transient as they were binding. This was a massive shift in thinking about individuals which impacted on work, social life and of course, the social sciences. Psychology, along with other social sciences, mirrored this new way of understanding the human condition. (p. 18)

Recent literature from the social justice movement in counselling psychology can be seen to reflect the earlier sentiments of socio-cultural explanations of distress, for example Ivey and Collins (2003) suggest that if society continues to oppress groups of individuals and unjust systems are maintained, then counselling psychologists will necessarily continue to work with victims of this system. As seen above from Prilleltensky and colleagues’ discussion of counselling, proponents of this social perspective have described how helping professionals have been taking the incorrect approach by treating one individual at a time, when the cause of distress may be rooted in society and communities. Indeed in a UK counselling psychology publication, Thatcher and Manktelow (2007) argue that:

If we recognise that the impact of social reality has a large part to play in either supporting well-being or causing and contributing to distress, we will begin to see the flaw in our current logic [of treating individuals]. (p. 34)

Taking this perspective some authors have argued that those counselling psychologists who do not take social action and work only on an individual level with individual clients are maintaining the status quo of unfavourable social conditions such as inequality and an unequal distribution of power (Vera & Speight, 2003).

### ***2.5.2. Related concepts: The multicultural and feminist movements in counselling psychology***

The history of the social justice movement in counselling psychology is often connected to, and sometimes directly traced back through, the emphasis on multiculturalism in counselling and counselling psychology (Chung & Bemak, 2012;

Vera & Speight, 2003). Chung and Bemak (2012, p. 8) note that “to understand social justice and human rights in the mental health domain, multicultural counseling must be thoroughly examined”. There are also connections between social justice and the feminist movement in counselling (Crethar et al., 2008). This section of the literature review therefore introduces these two areas of thought and their connection to social justice.

Similar to social justice, the history of the multicultural movement in counselling is traced back by several authors to the civil rights era in the US in the 1950s and 60s (Arrendondo & Perez, 2006; Chung & Bemak, 2012). Since the 1980s the focus of the movement was on developing guidelines and standards to help professionals respond in a culturally appropriate manner. This culminated in the APA approving a list of multicultural counselling guidelines in 2002 (APA, 2002). Multicultural counselling competencies have been defined as “...counselors’ attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills in working with clients from a variety of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups” (Chung & Bemak, 2012, p. 12). The approved APA guidelines for multicultural counselling are as follows:

- Guideline 1: *“Psychologists are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, they may hold attitudes and beliefs that can detrimentally influence their perceptions of and interactions with individuals who are ethnically and racially different from themselves”* (APA, 2002, p. 17)
- Guideline 2: *“Psychologists are encouraged to recognize the importance of multicultural sensitivity/ responsiveness, knowledge, and understanding about ethnically and racially different individuals”* (p. 25)
- Guideline 3: *“As educators, psychologists are encouraged to employ the constructs of multiculturalism and diversity in psychological education”* (p. 30)
- Guideline 4: *“Culturally sensitive psychological researchers are encouraged to recognize the importance of conducting culture-centered and ethical psychological research among persons from ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority backgrounds”* (p. 36)

- Guideline 5: “*Psychologists strive to apply culturally-appropriate skills in clinical and other applied psychological practices*” (p. 43)
- Guideline 6: “*Psychologists are encouraged to use organizational change processes to support culturally informed organizational (policy) development and practices*” (p. 50).

The APA guidelines make reference to the term ‘social justice’ on a number of occasions. In relation to the philosophical grounding and assumptions of the document, the APA appears to suggest that the guidelines are rooted in the same tradition of social justice:

[P]sychologists are in a position to provide leadership as agents of prosocial change, advocacy, and social justice, thereby promoting societal understanding, affirmation, and appreciation of multiculturalism against the damaging effects of individual, institutional, and societal racism, prejudice and all forms of oppression based on stereotyping and discrimination (APA, 2002, pp. 15-16)

Vera and Speight (2003) criticise the multicultural counselling competencies for being too narrow, and suggest that a broader social justice agenda is warranted. Their paper has not gone without criticism itself, and proponents of the multicultural counselling competencies have described the flaws in their analysis of the competencies. For example, Arrendondo and Perez (2003) argue that Vera and Speight, in suggesting that the multicultural counselling movement focuses too much on a micro level of change, have missed the fact that “[s]ocial justice has always been the core of the multicultural competency movement” (p. 282). They go on to highlight a number of inaccuracies in Vera and Speight’s portrayal of the multicultural competencies. More recently, Collins and Arthur (2010a; 2010b) give a critique and their response to the multicultural competencies, and set out their model of culture-infused counselling. One of the aims of this model is to represent a broader understanding of culture, extending it beyond just race and ethnicity to include a wider range of dimensions of personal cultural identity, such as gender, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, religion, language and social class (Collins & Arthur, 2010b). This broader definition leads to an inclusion of attitudinal

competencies such as “[u]phold social justice and equity for all members of society” and skills competencies such as “[e]ngage in professional and personal activities to promote social justice” in the framework (Collins & Arthur, 2010b, p. 224). This broad definition of culture appears to blur the line between where multiculturalism ends and social justice begins.

Crethar et al. (2008) suggest that the feminist counselling movement in the US can be traced back to the women’s movement in the 1960s and 70s. Feminist counselling has been difficult to define, and no single definition exists (Chester & Bretherton, 2001; Spong, 2008). Spong (2008), writing from a UK perspective, suggests that feminist counselling combines “the personal and political in a therapeutic process” (p. 119) and argues that the movement has been described both with regards to belief and process elements. Research has explored both how feminist counsellors describe the approach, as well as how counsellors who do not necessarily identify as ‘feminist’ view feminist counselling. In Australia, Chester and Bretherton (2001) explored what makes feminist counselling feminist and in a survey of 140 counsellors who self-identified as feminists they found that feminism was more often defined as a belief than as action working towards change. Only a small number of participants saw activism as essential, and several participants felt that their counselling was a form of social action. In the UK, Spong (2008) asked counsellors within a focus group what they would understand if someone described themselves as a feminist counsellor. Findings indicated that there was some unease within the group about both the perceived narrow approach of feminist counselling as well as the influence of the feminist counsellor over his or her client.

There appear to be varying opinions in the literature regarding how social justice and the multicultural and feminist movements are connected. Some authors have referred conjointly to the multicultural/social justice perspective (Pack-Brown, Thomas & Seymour, 2008). Crethar et al. (2008) note that they are often viewed as separate threads in counselling communities rather than as common threads in a single movement and emphasise the similarities in the traditions in an attempt to bring the threads together. Silverstein (2006, p. 22) comments that “feminism and multiculturalism are inextricably linked because the goal of both is social justice”, arguing that despite the sole focus on singular domains of diversity in both the

multicultural and feminist approaches they are united by a core underlying goal of social justice. This would suggest that social justice is viewed as a separate concept that perhaps includes both multicultural and feminist ideas. This position is consistent with writings in the social justice literature. For example Goodman et al. (2004) include working with marginalized groups as part of their definition of social justice work, which would include both women and those from ethnic minorities. Furthermore, they explicitly note that their ideas on the principles for social justice work of counselling psychologists were adapted from principles taken from the multicultural and feminist literatures in counselling (Goodman et al., 2004). In conclusion, it appears therefore that the focus on social justice in counselling psychology has developed from multicultural and feminist approaches in counselling, and that the social justice perspective can be considered to be a goal or wider movement which perhaps underlies both the multicultural and feminist agendas (Silervstein, 2006).

### ***2.5.3. Fit between social justice and the counselling psychology profession***

It has been argued that social justice is particularly of relevance for counselling psychologists (Vera & Speight, 2003). Having described the history and conceptual roots of social justice in counselling psychology, I now go on to discuss the connection between counselling psychology and social justice. Specifically I review literature which relates to the relevance and place of social justice within the field of counselling psychology. Initially I reflect on the arguments in the literature which suggest that counselling psychology is ideally placed to consider matters of social justice, before moving on to consider the potential issues which have been raised with this idea.

Palmer and Parish (2008), writing from a Canadian perspective, suggest that psychologists and counsellors are in a position to recognize and work with systemic oppression which impacts on the individual members of societies' wellbeing. They argue that because counsellors and psychologists are positioned in roles where there is a focus on well-being, they are ideally placed to consider issues of social justice. They do not make this claim specifically regarding counselling psychologists, as they also refer specifically to counsellors in their analysis. One might also note that



this argument appears to extend to other areas of applied psychology if the psychologists are in a role of being aware of wellbeing and the factors which impact upon it (see Vasquez, 2012). As discussed above it is not only in counselling psychology that social justice is discussed; clinical psychology, counselling and critical community psychology also have paid attention in varying degrees to the concept. Despite this, it has been regularly stated in counselling psychology literature that counselling psychology is ideally placed to consider matters of social justice (Goodman et al.; Vera & Speight, 2003; Palmer & Parish, 2008); For example, Hage (2003) notes that counselling psychology has had a “*particular* commitment to prevention, multiculturalism, and social justice” (p. 556, emphasis added).

Within the literature there appear to be two lines of argument which suggest that counselling psychology is ideally placed to consider matters of social justice. The first suggestion is that the values and particular emphasis of the counselling psychology profession are linked to social justice. For example, Vera and Speight (2003) discuss how counselling psychology specifically is ideally placed to consider matters of social justice, because of the emphasis on the individual in her or his context; strengths and resilience as opposed to a purely pathological approach; a holistic view of the individual; and developmental interventions. Packard (2009, p. 622) proposes that social justice explicitly forms one of the core values of the profession of counselling psychology, simply stating that “[w]e believe in social justice”. The second line of argument suggests that counselling psychology is ideally placed to consider social justice because of the historical context of the profession. For example, Goodman et al. (2004) argue that the history of counselling psychology is consistent with social justice work. They describe how from the beginning, counselling psychology has been concerned with environmental factors in conceptualising individuals’ presenting issues, heavily involved in feminist movements within psychology, and in the development of multicultural counselling. Indeed, Helms (2003) also notes that counselling psychology has had a “nontraditional perspective” (p. 307), and has a longstanding history of emphasizing multicultural perspectives in psychology.

There are potential issues both with arguments resting on the values of the counselling psychology profession and those resting on the historical development of the profession. In relation to the former of these arguments for the particular relevance of social justice to counselling psychology questions might be raised with generalization beyond the US profession. Due to space limitations, and as it is not the focus of this project I will not review the counselling psychology professions across the world. Instead I will illustrate this point using the example of the UK counselling psychology profession.

Moller (2011) outlines a critique of the identity of UK counselling psychology. She argues initially that the identity of the profession is difficult to determine due to the lack of a clear statement of the clear purpose and philosophy of the profession. Furthermore, she suggests that the two principles which she argues capture the espoused identity of the profession, humanism and phenomenology, are irrelevant and insufficient as cornerstones of counselling psychology. Moller explicitly contrasts US and UK counselling psychology and argues that whilst US counselling psychology has adopted a focus on multicultural issues as part of its identity, UK counselling psychology has been found in this respect “woefully and indeed shamefully lacking” (p. 14). Whilst she only mentions the concept of social justice in passing and instead focuses on multicultural counselling, Moller’s argument illustrates the importance of international differences in the identity of counselling psychology professions. Although there has been some engagement with issues related to or part of social justice within the UK literature (see Spong, 2012; Thatcher & Manktelow, 2007; Blair, 2009, for examples) there is not evidence of an explicit discussion of ‘social justice’ as seen in the US counselling psychology literature (Cutts, 2013). No reference is made to social justice within the first section of the *Handbook of Counselling Psychology*, entitled ‘What is counselling psychology’ (Woolfe, Strawbridge, Douglas & Dryden, 2010), and only one chapter within the book makes reference to social justice (Kagan et al., 2010). Therefore whilst it is clear that perhaps social justice is connected to the identity of the US counselling psychology profession, it is unclear whether this might translate to counselling psychology professions located in different geographical regions.

Specifically, there remains a question about the fit between counselling psychology and social justice outside of the US.

There might also be issues with extending the latter of the two arguments beyond the scope of the US counselling psychology profession. That is to say it may not be possible to generalize the argument that social justice is particularly relevant to counselling psychology because of the historical development of the profession outside of the US. Across the countries in which counselling psychology has been to some degree established, there is considerable difference in terms of the level of development and the extent to which the profession is established (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009). For example, in the US counselling psychology has been traced back to the 1950s (Munley, Duncan, McDonnell & Sauer, 2004) whereas in New Zealand it has existed only since the 1980s (Stanley & Manthei, 2004). Whilst there are some similarities across the professions (Pelling, 2004), differences can be drawn in terms of historical development (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009). Having discussed two of the arguments in the literature which suggest that social justice is particularly of relevance to counselling psychology, I now move on to consider two potential issues with connecting social justice and counselling psychology which have been discussed in the literature. Specifically, I critically reflect on firstly the value-laden nature and then the political nature of a social justice agenda in counselling psychology.

A social justice perspective in counselling psychology is an approach rooted in values (Prilleltensky, 1997; Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Kagan et al., 2011). The value-specific nature of incorporating a commitment to social justice into counselling psychology is a potential area of criticism, and arguments have been made that social justice has no place in counselling psychology because of the imposition of values into counselling. In the UK, Kagan et al. (2011) describe how a value approach to psychology is in contrast to the dominant model which argues for a distinction between facts and values, with values having no place in psychology. Research has found that counsellors experience a tension around bringing values into counselling. Spong (2008) as part of a focus group study in the UK explored what counsellors think about feminist counselling. Her findings suggested that counsellors considered that feminist counselling may be problematic as it could impose a

viewpoint on the client. Spong (2008, p. 130) concluded that “[t]he legitimacy of the counsellor addressing issues of social inequality within her therapeutic practice continues to be a vexed question”. In contrast to this, Harrist and Richardson (2012) explored the issue of values in counselling and considered whether social justice work is problematic because of the tradition of remaining neutral. They concluded that it is neither possible, nor desirable to detach oneself from one’s values and therefore social justice does not need to be considered at odds with counselling. The authors state that a

social justice orientation to counseling represents not an arbitrary intrusion of one’s values but a courageous recognition that counseling at times can serve to perpetuate a status quo that is harmful to many (p. 42).

This is consistent with other voices in the literature (e.g. Chantler, 2005). Further to the rooting of social justice in values, adopting a social justice approach in counselling psychology has been associated with politics. Beer et al. (2012) investigated the experiences of counselling psychology trainees who were identified as ‘activists’. These activists described social justice work as necessarily and inherently political. Similar to the area of values in psychology, there are also mixed views in the literature about the coming together of politics and psychology. Authors such as Fox and Prilleltensky (1996, p. 2) argue that “politics in psychology is inescapable”. They suggest that all public discourse is inherently political, and the work of psychologists falls under this. Furthermore, Prilleltensky et al. (2007, p. 34) follow the feminist tradition and state that “*the personal is political*” and argue that to ignore the reality of politics within psychology is to potentially practice unethically by unintentionally or intentionally blaming clients for their problems. Nevertheless, some authors have suggested that psychologists may consider social justice work to be beyond the scope of their role. Fox (2003) comments that some practitioners may be happy with a separation between their politics and their job as a psychologist. In the UK, Milton and Legg (2000) reviewed psychotherapeutic literature as part of an attempt to review the ways in which therapists engage with political material in therapeutic practice. They suggested that the struggle is evident in the literature, and argue that the limited engagement with the issue of therapy and political material is worrying. The issue of the political nature of social justice and

the inclusion of politics within psychology might therefore be relevant in a discussion of the fit between social justice and counselling psychology.

#### ***2.5.4. Fit between social justice and individual counselling psychologists***

A further question could be raised regarding the extent to which the values espoused in academic writings about the counselling psychology profession might translate to the individual counselling psychologist, that is to say, what an individual counselling psychologist thinks about the fit between counselling psychology and social justice values. I have argued elsewhere that in order to consistently adopt a social justice approach, counselling psychologists would have to consider changing several aspects of their practice, and may as part of this, face some difficult decisions (Cutts, 2013). Having considered the connection between social justice and counselling psychology as a profession, within this section I focus more specifically on the fit between social justice and the individual counselling psychologist.

Baluch, Pieterse and Bolden (2004) have commented that despite the literature in the area, they have seen limited evidence in the real world to suggest that social justice actually forms an integral part of how counselling psychologists (in the US) view their work. This led them to question whether social justice was really something that counselling psychologists wanted to be involved with. Matthew Miller and colleagues have recently developed a quantitative measure of social justice interest and commitment (The Social Issues Questionnaire, SIQ) (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). Social justice interest refers to ones' likes and dislikes with regards to social justice action, and social justice commitment has been defined as referring to ones' intentions to engage in social justice advocacy in the future (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). They reported research in which 229 counselling psychology doctoral trainees in the US completed the SIQ and demonstrated relatively high levels of social justice interest and commitment (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). This might indicate that counselling psychology trainees have an interest in and commitment to social justice action, consistent with the espoused values of the profession. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that they found higher levels of social justice interest and commitment in this particular study in comparison to a previous piece of research which had a wider range of university students in its

sample, rather than purely counselling psychology trainees (Miller et al., 2009). Nevertheless as the participants were drawn only from the US counselling psychology profession, it again does not necessarily inform us about the social justice interest and commitments of members of other counselling psychology professions across the globe. No prior research has been found which investigates the social justice interest and commitment of UK based counselling psychologists. Miller and Sendrowitz (2011) also focus on counselling psychologists in training, leaving the question of qualified counselling psychologists' social justice interest unanswered.

How do counselling psychologists develop an interest in and commitment to social justice? Caldwell and Vera (2010) investigated critical incidents in the development of a social justice orientation, with both trainee and qualified counselling psychologists from the US. They found five major themes in their data, indicating that the influence of significant persons such as mentors, family and friends and peers; exposure to injustice; education and learning through coursework, reading, and their training programme; work experiences, including both clinical and research work; and religion or spirituality were all important critical incidents in the development of an interest in social justice. Exposure to injustice was most frequently ranked as the most important critical incident, followed by the influence of significant persons and religion. Participants indicated that these incidents facilitated a commitment to social justice through increasing awareness, increasing understanding of social justice, impacting the individual's personal and professional identity and changing behaviours such as initiating further learning or engagement in activism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010). A subsequent study by Beer et al. (2012) provided consistent results regarding the impact of significant persons and exposure to injustice. Beer et al. (2012) referred to this as 'contact' which covers both the importance of contact with social justice role models, and contact with injustices.

## **2.6. Putting social justice into practice**

Having reviewed the literature which focuses on social justice in counselling psychology in terms of the background, related concepts and the fit between social justice and both the counselling psychology profession and individual counselling psychologists, I now move on to consider literature which focuses on putting social justice values into practice. Speight and Vera (2004) highlight a concern seen in the literature that ‘social justice’ may function as a mere buzzword; that is to say, a concern that counselling psychologists may not actually consider what a commitment to social justice really means to the profession. Their contribution makes an important distinction between social justice as a value and social justice action. This discussion of social justice as a potential buzzword reflects the earlier sentiments of Sherman (1984, p. 112) who described a “gap between rhetoric and outcome”, because authors neglect to advocate revolutionary methods of achieving change. Similarly, Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997, p. 177) suggested that “[social justice] is the value where the discrepancy between rhetoric and action is the greatest”. Indeed, Baluch et al. (2004) argue that although counselling psychology has a long history of acknowledging diversity and understanding societal oppression, social action does not appear to be central to the identity of counselling psychologists. They concluded that counselling psychology was not acting on its “good intentions” (p. 92). Many authors therefore have raised a concern about how values translate into action. Due to this concern about the possible gap between rhetoric and practice, discussions in the literature have gone beyond an exploration of social justice values in counselling psychology and moved toward discussing how social justice values translate into practice. This section considers this area of thought within three sections. Initially I review the literature on recommendations and guidelines for engaging in social justice work; then I review the research on how this translates into the real world practice of counselling psychologists; and finally I reflect on potential issues which might hinder the social justice action of counselling psychologists.

### ***2.6.1. Guidelines for translating values into practice***

As aforementioned, authors in the field have begun to consider how psychologists might engage in social justice work. Various suggestions of types of social justice work are included in numerous sources across the literature. For example authors have suggested that counselling psychologists might broaden their roles to include: advocacy; outreach; prevention; psycho-education; consultation; work on public policy; consciousness raising; and education. They might also amend the counselling psychology training curriculum to reflect a social justice paradigm; and challenge discrimination in society (Baluch et al., 2004; Palmer & Parish, 2008; Sherman, 1984; Vera & Speight, 2003; Fouad et al., 2006). The following quote from Arrendondo and Perez (2003) illustrates the way in which many suggestions for action have been put forward:

From our professional roles, we have a responsibility to be role models in word and deed. In terms of social justice advocacy, we recommend that counselling psychologists read and teach broadly, drawing from multiple sources; engage in “difficult dialogues” with colleagues; get on the front lines and act as models; communicate information about social justice concerns to students; and take a public position on issues such as bilingual educations, affirmative action, and the harassment of undocumented immigrants (p. 288).

A notable contribution to this discussion comes from Goodman et al. (2004), who propose a list of six guiding principles for counselling psychologists who wish to engage in social justice work: ongoing self-examination; sharing power; giving voice; facilitating consciousness raising; building on strengths; and leaving clients with tools for social change. Ongoing self-examination translates to the practitioner reflecting on his or her biases, values and any preconceived notions he or she may have in order to make any values which may be brought into his or her practice explicit. For example a psychologist might reflect on his or her position in terms of the power distribution between himself or herself and the client, and to be aware of how socio-political forces have shaped his or her identity. Sharing power relates to an awareness and conscious effort to share the power held by the psychologist. Rather than placing herself or himself in a position of someone who is the expert and



knows how to emancipate the oppressed, the psychologist following this principle would occupy a position of co-learner with her or his client(s). The third principle of giving a voice translates to the psychologist enabling oppressed individual(s) to be heard, both within and outside of the therapeutic setting. The psychologist might initially listen to an individual or group and then might try to find a way for others to hear the individual's or the group's voice. Goodman et al. (2004) suggest this can include publishing qualitative studies with and about community members, taking ideas to those who make policy and working with the media. Consciousness raising involves making connections between the social context and the individual; a psychologist might help a client understand how socio-political environmental factors have impacted on his or her life. The fifth principle of focusing on strengths is postulated to help individuals or communities see themselves as powerful and competent. Acting on this guideline, Goodman and colleagues suggest that a psychologist might work with her or his client to reframe his or her actions as adaptive responses to oppressive situations. Finally, the principle of leaving clients with tools for social change suggests that a psychologist should leave the community in a way such that his or her presence is no longer necessary for the community to flourish. A psychologist working on fostering this principle might consider consulting with the community early in the work to agree on what they will need to be able to continue following the psychologists departure from the project (Goodman et al., 2004).

Some authors have suggested that these guidelines, whilst a good beginning, do not quite go far enough in suggesting appropriate ways forward for acting on social justice values in counselling psychology. For example, Watts (2004) argues that psychologists should adopt the Goodman et al. tenets whilst also reconceptualising some of the traditional concepts in conventional psychological thinking, in order to move beyond micro levels of thinking to higher levels of analysis. For example he describes both "conceptual rehabilitation" (p. 856) of concepts such as self-efficacy to a consideration of "collective efficacy" (p. 857), as well as a more fundamental "conceptual transformation" (p. 856) of self-actualization to "social liberation and self-determination" (p. 859). I would argue that it is much less clear what these additional ideas would look like in real-life practice for counselling psychologists.

For example what does a consideration of collective efficacy look like for a counselling psychologist? Whilst the Goodman et al. principles do not perhaps extend far enough for some authors, what they do in their 2004 article is to make clear what some of the principles might look like for psychologists.

Following the success of the multicultural counselling competencies, authors have made a move toward developing competencies for professionals in the area of social justice. Constantine et al. (2007) have proposed nine specific social justice competencies, which are as follows:

- (1) Be knowledgeable about oppression and social inequalities and the impact these may have on the societal, cultural and individual levels;
- (2) participate in ongoing self-reflection on issues of race, ethnicity, power and oppression;
- (3) maintain an awareness of one's own position of power;
- (4) challenge inappropriate therapeutic interventions;
- (5) possess knowledge about indigenous healing models and actively collaborate with these when necessary in order to provide culturally relevant interventions;
- (6) have an awareness of types of social injustice which occur internationally;
- (7) work on a preventative and remedial level with marginalized populations;
- (8) collaborate with communities in democratic partnerships; and
- (9) develop advocacy skills and ability to provide systemic interventions to promote social change processes.

### ***2.6.2. Real world social justice practice of counselling psychologists***

Although Goodman et al. (2004) do describe their own experiences of putting their guidelines into practice, it is important to consider how this is happening elsewhere and whether the principles they lay out are translated into counselling psychology practice. Within this section therefore I review relevant research literature in order to elucidate how counselling psychologists may be acting on the principles and competencies described above in their actual practice.

Research has begun to investigate how counselling practitioners are acting on their social justice values, and one relevant citation has been found which explores this. Singh, Urbano, Haston and McMahan (2010) explored the strategies that school counsellors use to advocate for systemic change in their schools. They found that counsellors used “political savvy” (p. 139) and consciousness raising as an overarching theme throughout the advocacy process; counsellors paid great attention to when, how and whom to speak to regarding social issues. Counsellors described how part of their social justice action involved initiating challenging conversations with teachers, and also a focus on the formation of positive working relationships as a source of support in initiating change. Counsellors described working with students, teachers, administrators and teachers. One theme captured the way in which participants taught students advocacy skills in order to facilitate autonomy and agency. Educating people about the counsellors’ role was also important, in terms of being able to spread the word about social justice interventions operating in the school; and marketing of social issues through using school data was an important part of social justice practice for the counsellors (Singh, Urbano et al., 2010).

Beer et al. (2012) considered what we can learn from counselling psychology trainees who are social justice activists. Within this, some of the findings related to the social justice practice of participants. For example, participants in the study reported confronting friends, family and colleagues about behaviour or language they perceived to be unjust. Another one of the themes in the data was that social justice is inherently political and in terms of social justice action, participants described engaging in public protests and political campaigns. Thompson, Cole and Nitzarim (2012) interviewed low-income clients about their experiences of therapy

and found that participants' therapists had often been willing to go beyond the traditional 50 minute therapy hour and engage in advocacy work including helping with documentation for insurance; being flexible about payment structures; and signposting to relevant community organizations. One of the participants described her therapist's action: "She will do whatever it takes to keep me alive". As the focus of the study by Thompson et al. (2012) was on the clients' perspective, it is unclear what the qualifications of the therapists were.

Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) asked counselling psychology trainees how they practised social justice, both professionally and personally. They found six themes in response to the professional practice of social justice. Trainees reported that they actively challenged their own belief systems and worldviews; engaged in self-education to increase their knowledge and understanding of social issues; and attempted to bring their social justice values into action in the counselling room by addressing the power imbalance with their clients, building a collaborative relationship, and examining the oppressed status of their clients. Additionally they described engaging in research on social issues; trying to raise consciousness levels of students when engaged in teaching work; and taking part in activism in campus and community settings. In terms of their personal practice of social justice, the trainees again reflected on the importance of their own self-awareness and reflecting on their biases and assumptions as part of social justice action. Furthermore, similar to their professional practice of social justice they described engaging in self-education on social justice issues. Trainees sought to engage in consciousness raising in their personal lives, for example by promoting social justice issues within friendship groups and family. The importance of "walking the talk" (p. 782) was highlighted, and the authors describe how participants found social justice action to be of fundamental importance. Finally, participants described being involved in activism in their personal lives, predominantly in a political arena, such as writing letters to politicians and engaging in lobbying, voting and volunteering. It was concluded that participants were able to infuse social justice across numerous areas of their professional lives: research, teaching and clinical work, as well as acting in their personal lives. They also commented that participants had struggled to separate their personal and professional social justice practice, and that congruence between

talk and practice was important as a part of this. The research by Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) provides interesting data to illustrate how members of the counselling psychology profession are incorporating social justice work into their practice. Nevertheless, the research was again conducted in the US. As described above, because of the differences amongst counselling psychology professions, it is unclear whether these findings can be generalized elsewhere.

These studies inform us to some degree about how members of the counselling psychology profession translate social justice values into social justice action in real life professional practice, beyond guidelines set out for example by Goodman et al. (2004). However considering the limitations discussed and the paucity of relevant research studies, there is limited evidence on the actual social justice action of members of the counselling psychology profession, particularly outside of the US counselling psychology profession.

### ***2.6.3. Potential issues or barriers to engaging in social justice work in counselling psychology***

Within the literature, as well as highlighting the importance and relevance of social justice ideas and practices to counselling psychology, several potential issues have been raised with regards to social justice action in counselling psychology. As Speight and Vera (2009) comment in relation to social action in school psychology:

There will likely be starts, stops, fits, hits, and misses as the field engages the challenge of social justice. (p. 89)

This section of the literature review extends our understanding of the social justice action of counselling psychologists by considering the potential problems or barriers to engaging in social justice work which have been discussed in the literature.

In their discussion of “nice counselor syndrome” Bemak and Chung (2008, p. 372) consider several potential obstacles which school counsellors in the US might face when trying to put their social justice values into practice. They divide these into two types of obstacles: personal and professional. The personal obstacles they highlight include personal fear of being disliked or discredited by colleagues; being labelled as

a troublemaker; a feeling of apathy; anxiety about injustice, leading to guilt, apprehension or uneasiness; anger leading to ineffective responses; feeling of being powerless; and a sense of personal discomfort. Findings from research in the area echo some of these themes. Beer et al. (2012) interviewed counselling psychologists with high levels of social justice activism and, although not the focus of their project, they found that the participants felt that social justice was a struggle. This struggle was perceived to be partly due to social situations potentially not changing as a result of social justice work, and the need to persevere in the face of this fact was highlighted. The notion of social justice as a struggle is also consistent with the ideas of Kiselica and Robinson (2001) who suggest that there is a potential price to pay for engaging in social justice action: “feeling emotionally drained” (p. 393).

Bemak and Chung (2008) also reference several professional barriers including professional paralysis of the counsellor; resistance from other staff; job security; a culture of fear; and risk of professional and character assassinations. Helms (2003) considers the issue of counselling psychologists working in systems, and notes that those who believe in social justice principles sometimes forget that counselling psychologists indeed work in systems and those systems might not be encouraging of or receptive to interventions which threatened the status quo. This appears to be consistent with Bemak and Chung’s professional barriers, particularly resistance from other staff, job security and risk of character assassinations. Again research supports the suggestion that there may be such professional barriers to engaging in social justice work. Participants in the research by Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010), spoke of institutional barriers and lack of support for social justice from members of staff in the faculty. Indeed, the report by Beer et al. (2012) also makes reference to professional barriers experienced by participants. Nevertheless, both of these studies were conducted with only counselling psychology trainees on doctoral training programmes. Therefore the professional barriers they spoke of were limited to barriers in academic department or university. Furthermore, the potential barriers described by Bemak and Chung (2008) were focused on the role of a school counsellor and empirical research would be required in order to see whether these potential barriers were experienced by counselling psychologists in different settings.

Finally, there might be tensions between models of therapeutic practice and the theoretical models counselling psychologists are trained in and social justice work, which might therefore impact on a counselling psychologists' ability to engage in social justice action. Indeed, the fact that social justice has been labelled as a "fifth force" in counselling, following the psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic and multicultural 'forces' (Ratts, 2009, p. 161), indicates a separation from the traditional models of counselling practice. The former three models: psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural and humanistic, have been critiqued by counselling psychologists within the social justice literature as having an overly individualistic emphasis (Ivey & Collins, 2003). Consistent with this, there are references in the literature to issues with these models which may preclude anyone working from within that particular perspective from acting on any social justice values they hold. For example, Tolleson (2009) discusses the lack of engagement with the social domain within psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapy. She notes that:

Increasingly, and perhaps especially in its American form (i.e., deriving from ego psychology), psychoanalysis has become, seemingly, more conservative in scope and tone, having abandoned many of its claims to social transformation and retracted much of its earlier political *chutzpah*. Whatever the case, clinical psychoanalysis has opted out of its contribution to critical social praxis and has found safe harbour as an individual healing technology that promotes social adaptation rather than social unrest. (p. 194)

She argues that whilst psychodynamic and psychoanalytic approaches may have at one time been radical, they have over time shifted their focus purely to the individual partially due to an attempt to become credible in the mainstream (Tolleson, 2009). Similarly, Lago (2011) argues that the person-centred approach has neglected to recognize the importance of cultural and diversity issues in its theory and practice. He suggests that the postulate of the person-centred tradition that all that is needed is Carl Rogers' six necessary and sufficient conditions is naïve and ignores a multitude of social factors impacting on well-being (Lago, 2011). Nevertheless, there has been some reference within the UK person-centred literature to elements of social justice and politics, as well as to multiculturalism (Proctor, Cooper, Sanders & Malcolm,

2006; Spangenberg, 2003). Indeed, as Gillon (2007) describes, at the end of Carl Rogers' life, he wrote about global peace and demonstrated an interest in the wider social and political applications of the therapeutic conditions he advocated. Finally, cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT) has received a large amount of criticism within the literature which, despite not referring to 'social justice', appears to come from a social justice perspective. For example, critiques have centred on the role of the therapist within the CBT model. Authors in the UK have suggested that the active directive role of the therapist advocated by the approach might be problematic in terms of the power dynamics within the relationship between therapist and client (Proctor, 2008). Proctor also suggests that CBT may easily miss the wider social, economic, and political factors impacting on an individual's wellbeing due to the emphasis within the approach on changing the way someone appraises a given event. This argument therefore could be taken to suggest that instead of helping someone fight injustice, CBT helps him or her learn to cope with the situation. Consistent with this, Spong and Hollanders (2005) investigated cognitive counsellors' constructions of social power in the UK. They referred to participants' dominant repertoire in their constructions of social power as 'worlds apart' and concluded that the counsellors in their study primarily judged counselling and social power as separate. Three of the participants reflected on the practical nature of cognitive counselling in helping individuals "get along in society as it is" (p. 56). Other arguments have similarly critiqued CBT with reference to power imbalances, for example Guilfoyle (2008) suggested that the popularity of the approach was due to the comfortable fit between CBT and the current cultural power arrangements. Therefore, the psychodynamic, person-centred, and CBT traditions have all be criticised from a social justice perspective, which may be problematic for a counselling psychologist wishing to engage in social justice action.



## **2.7. Research questions**

To summarize, the literature review has indicated that whilst there is a wealth of theoretical and conceptual literature in the area of social justice and counselling psychology, only a handful of pieces of empirical research have addressed the topic of social justice specifically with regard to counselling psychologists. Furthermore, it emerged from the literature review that whilst this research has begun to provide us with an idea of the social justice interest, commitment and action of counselling psychologists based in the US, no research was identified which was conducted within the counselling psychology profession in the UK. Therefore a substantial gap in the literature was noted. Given these gaps in the literature, the overarching purpose of the present research was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. The following research questions were considered within this:

1. What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice? (Priority qualitative research question)
2. What do a self-selecting sample of members of the counselling psychology profession based in the United Kingdom score on the Social Issues Questionnaire? (Preliminary quantitative research question)

The methodology adopted in order to address the overarching purpose of the research and the chosen research questions will be detailed in the following chapter.

## **2.8. Chapter summary**

Within this chapter I reviewed the relevant theoretical and research literature in five key areas: (1) defining social justice; (2) critical approaches to psychology; (3) social justice in the allied professions of clinical psychology and critical community psychology; (4) social justice in counselling psychology, focusing on the history of the social justice movement in counselling psychology, related concepts, and the suggested fit between social justice values and the profession; and finally (5) social justice action in counselling psychology, looking specifically at the proposed methods of social justice action for counselling psychologists, the ‘real life’ social justice practice of counselling psychologists, and potential issues with engaging in social justice action. I then went on to outline that due to the paucity of research exploring the social justice interest, commitment and action of counselling psychologists, and the lack of research from within UK counselling psychology the present research was designed in order to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. Within this two questions were considered. ‘What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice?’ was the priority question within the research, along with a second research question from the preliminary stage of the research: ‘What do a self-selecting sample of members of the counselling psychology profession based in the United Kingdom score on the Social Issues Questionnaire?’.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

As outlined in the previous chapter the overarching purpose of the current project was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. Within this, two research questions were posed, which are listed below in order of their priority in the research project:

1. What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice? (Priority qualitative research question)
2. What do a self-selecting sample of members of the counselling psychology profession based in the United Kingdom score on the Social Issues Questionnaire? (Preliminary quantitative research question)

A participant-selection variant of the explanatory mixed methods design was used to answer the research questions posed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, 2013; Ivankova et al., 2006). The purposes of the use of a mixed methods design can be expressed as sampling and complementarity (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). An initial quantitative survey phase using the Social Issues Questionnaire was conducted to collect survey data on members of the counselling psychology profession's levels of social justice interest and commitment (SIQ; Miller et al., 2009). The finding that there was a small response rate in this phase of the research and therefore a modest sample size prohibited any detailed analyses, however the quantitative data were briefly analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative phase was considered the priority in the research, and had the purpose of exploring the social justice interest and commitment of a subsample of the participants from the initial sample in more depth. To answer the qualitative research question semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals whose scores on the SIQ indicated that they had at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice in the preliminary phase. Qualitative data were analysed using techniques from the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rennie, Phillips &

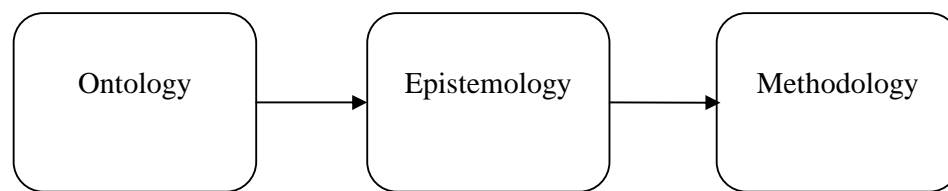
Quartaro, 1988; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The quantitative and qualitative phases were connected at two points. Specifically, the stages were connected at the point of sampling, and then findings were integrated during the interpretation phase of the research in the discussion which follows (Ivankova et al., 2006). Within this chapter I firstly give brief details of my epistemological position as the researcher. I then go on to set out the methodology, and consider in turn the phases of the research. This includes detailing information on the recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures involved, with reference to relevant standards of validity. Finally I discuss the ethical issues which were involved in the research.

### **3.2. Epistemological Positioning**

In this section I give an overview of the epistemological positioning of the current research project. This is useful to outline because my epistemological commitments as the researcher are one factor which has contributed to the methodological decisions made in the process of this project. I firstly describe my ontological and epistemological commitments, and then following this I reflect on the way in which I understand ontology, epistemology and methodological decision making to be interconnected in the process of research design.

As an individual's epistemological position is in part constrained by his or her ontological position it seems appropriate to begin here. Ontology refers to one's beliefs about the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 2007). Ontology is the study of what there is, of what exists. Simply put, my ontological commitments are that I believe that there is one objective physical reality. Epistemology has been defined as the theory of knowledge and it deals with the question of how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 2007). For the current purposes my epistemological position can be considered akin to 'post-positivism', as described by Ponterotto (2005). In brief, a post-positivist epistemology suggests that there is an objective reality, which we can *attempt* to imperfectly and probabilistically know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As Ponterotto (2005) notes, post-positivism recognizes the problem of verification outlined by Popper (1965). Despite traditionally being a foundation for quantitative research methods (Ponterotto, 2005), this epistemological position argues that both

quantitative and qualitative research may be useful in creating levels of knowledge about the world (Morrow, 2005). Nevertheless, it is commonly assumed that qualitative approaches are underpinned by constructivist epistemological positions. Often authors appear to suggest a simple linear connection between epistemology and methodology, such that if you are adopting a qualitative methodology you necessarily subscribe to a constructivist epistemology. For examples see Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Crotty (1998). See Figure 1 for an illustration of this relationship.



**Figure 1- Relationship between epistemology and methodology (Adapted from Guba & Lincoln, 1994)**

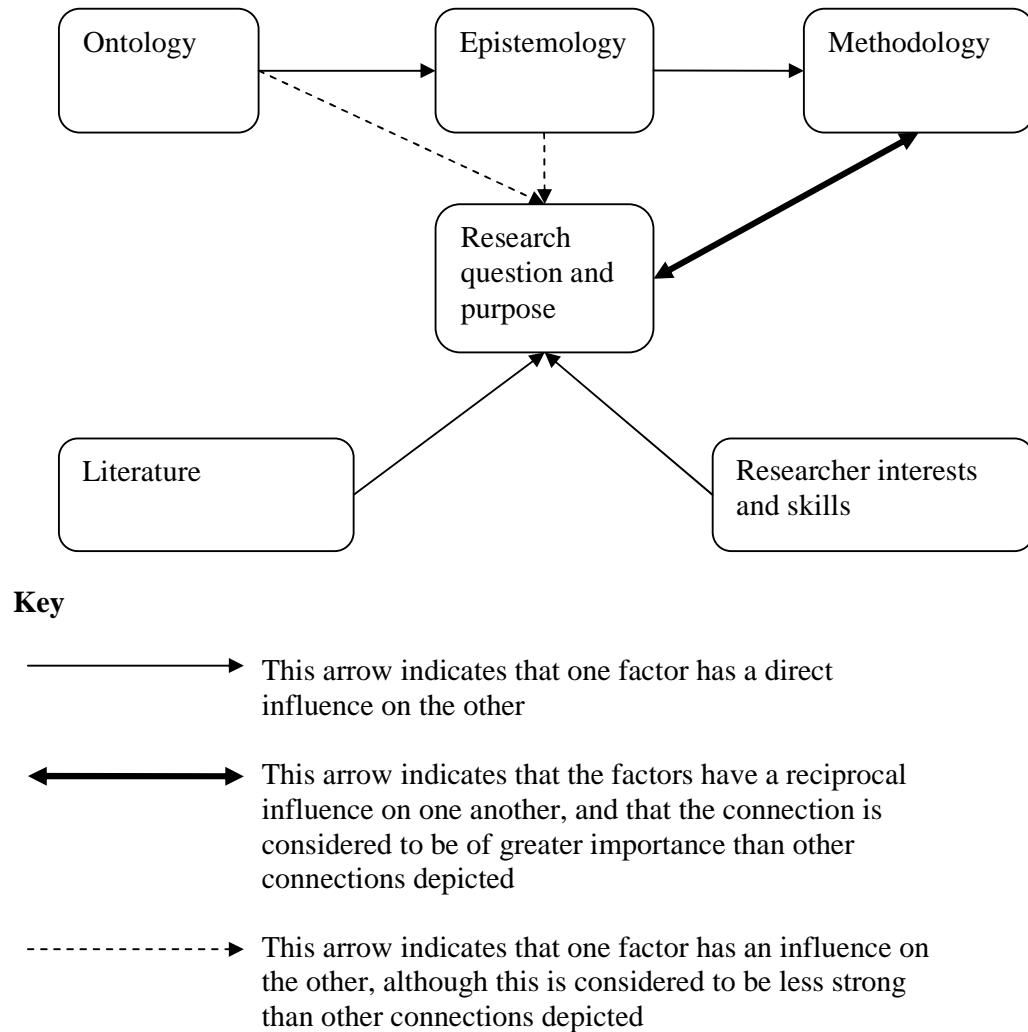
To an individual who subscribes to this linear, necessary connection between epistemology and methodology, the methodological decisions taken in the current project may seem at odds with my epistemology as detailed above. However I would argue that Figure 1 represents an oversimplification of the decisions undertaken within a research project. Specifically, this oversimplifies the connections between ontology, epistemology and methodology in the process of research design. I would argue that, although often taken as such in the literature, methodology is not determined or dictated wholly by epistemology. That is to say, although it is certainly an influencing factor, an epistemological position *does not necessitate* a given research methodology. This is a position made clear in the literature by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005):

the epistemology does not dictate which specific data collection and data analytical methods should be used by researchers (p. 376)

Contrary to the linear relationship between epistemology and methodology, many researchers particularly within the mixed methods field have now suggested that “there is no fixed correspondence between type of research purpose and the three

core paradigms” (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 276). Gorard (2004) reflects on the issue of research paradigms and methods and argues that we should not invoke a paradigm as the starting point for decision making in research. Consistent with this suggestion, Greene (2008) describes research conducted by her graduate students which found that researchers rarely cite epistemology as a key influence on their methodological decision-making. This suggests that epistemology does not always function as an explicit consideration in the research design process, as the literature may lead us to believe. Gorard further suggests that it is impractical to rigidly connect all methods to epistemological commitments, and argues that “no research design implies either qualitative or quantitative data” (Gorard, 2004, p. 5).

If there is not a fixed connection, or a simple linear relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology, how do these factors interact? I would argue that the linear relationship neglects several other factors in the research design process, which when considered together build a more comprehensive understanding of the various influences on decisions regarding research methodology. See Figure 2 for an illustration of the proposed relationships.



**Figure 2 - Proposed relationships between the various factors influencing decisions about research methodology**

In the above diagram, ontology exerts a direct influence on epistemology and epistemology also has a direct impact on methodology. At this stage the relationships are the same as proposed by authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Crotty (1998). These connections are proposed to proceed as follows. Our ontological commitments are our beliefs about what exists and what is real, and therefore our ideas about what can be known about reality. Our epistemology concerns what knowledge is, and the relationship between the ‘knower’ and the things which can be known; therefore this is constrained to an extent by what we believe exists in order to be known (ontology). Methodology concerns how in practice we can go about

learning about things, which is influenced to a degree by our beliefs about what we consider to count as knowledge, therefore how we determine if we have learned something (epistemology), and what exists to be known (ontology) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I will now discuss the ways in which my understanding of the relationships between these factors differs from the relationship discussed above.

The fundamental difference between the linear relationship described above and the current proposal is the inclusion of additional factors which influence research methodology. Of prime importance within this is the influence of the research purpose and question, which will have a direct impact on the decisions regarding methodology. Consistent with Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005, p. 377) I consider this to be the primary factor in decisions regarding methodology and “the research question should drive the method(s) used”. For example, if a researcher wishes to determine the proportion of students who are in paid employment whilst completing a doctorate in counselling psychology and the proportion of students who are not, she is likely to use a quantitative methodological approach. If however she is interested in the experience of trainee counselling psychologists who are in paid employment, she is more likely to utilise a qualitative approach. The importance of this connection is illustrated in Figure 2 by the thicker line between research question and methodology. In addition to this connection whereby research question has an influence on methodology, I would argue that methodology has an influence on research question. Researchers will often choose or amend the wording of their research question to illustrate the methodological approach chosen (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011 for an example of this).

Other factors have also been added which are proposed to indirectly impact decisions regarding methodology, through their influence on the research purpose and question. The factors which influence the choice of research question are the researcher’s ontological and epistemological commitments, the literature, and the researcher’s interests and skills. A researcher will decide upon a research question which is informed both by his own interests, passions, and skills as a researcher, and the literature in the area given. As researchers we look to fill gaps in the literature, and the gaps are largely identified because of our interests, passions, and skills. Furthermore, in addition to the linear connection described above, ontology and



epistemology are suggested to have a secondary, indirect influence on research methodology through their influence on choices regarding research question. For example, I might have an ontological commitment where I believe that both non physical and physical things exist, and within this I believe in the existence of a soul. I might therefore design a piece of research addressing the question ‘does the soul live in the pineal gland?’ If however my ontological commitments were that only physical things exist, I would not ask such a research question because I wouldn’t consider non physical things such as the soul to exist and therefore to be able to be known. Therefore ontology exerts a degree of influence over the choice of research question, which as discussed above will then have an influence on methodological decisions. My epistemological position might be constructivist, and I might therefore choose to conduct a piece of research exploring how researcher and participant co-construct understandings of gender in therapy. However if I held an objectivist epistemological position I would believe that the subject and object are distinct and that knowledge is not ‘co-constructed’ in this way, and would therefore not pose such a research question. Therefore, epistemology also has an influence on the decision of research questions, which then has an influence on methodology.

I believe that this explanation of the relationship between ontology, epistemology and research methodology, whilst still necessarily simplifying decision making and the factors involved, more accurately captures the process involved than the simple linear connection described above. Most importantly, these proposed relationships highlight the importance of the research question and purpose of the research in determining methodology. This is the factor which I would argue, considering its importance, is significantly neglected by authors who argue for the linear, necessary connection. Within the current project my decisions regarding methodology and method were therefore influenced by the various factors included in Figure 2. I attempted to make decisions regarding methodology and methods by considering what the best way to answer the questions I had posed was, rather than judging which methodologies and methods I should use based on my epistemological position alone. My decision regarding the research question was influenced by the literature in the area, my interests and skills, and my epistemological and ontological commitments. The primary research question indicated that the aim of the project

was not to discover a universal truth but rather to explore the topic area from the point of view of the participants, therefore a qualitative approach was judged wholly appropriate, as particular methodological choices were not *necessitated* by my objectivist stance. In terms of how my epistemological position did impact on the present research project, whilst acknowledging the inevitability of some level of subjectivity, I would suggest that through the use of procedures for bracketing of my own biases and assumptions I attempted to discover the perspective of the participant and minimize the level of researcher bias, as opposed to for example embracing the subjectivity (Morrow, 2005; see section 3.4.2(vi), below).

A final point to note here is that some researchers within the mixed methods field have reflected upon what it means to mix or bring together two different epistemological positions within one project (Greene, 2008). For example, Beer et al. (2012) describe a dialectic stance in their research where two different paradigms, specifically post-positivist and constructivist-interpretivist paradigms, underpinned the two different stages of the research. This mixing of epistemological positions is not what I am describing here. Instead I argue that it is not inconsistent to adopt a mixed methods study utilizing predominantly qualitative methods, as in the present project, when the researcher's epistemological positions are akin to post-positivism.

### **3.3. Methodology**

A ‘participant-selection variant’ of an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova et al., 2006; Ivankova, 2013; this design has also been referred to as a qualitative follow up design, Morgan, 1998). Within this section I firstly reflect on definitions of a mixed methods approach, and then I discuss the history of, and some critiques of the paradigm. Following this I discuss the specific mixed methods nature of the current project including outlining the steps taken and the reasons for adopting a mixed methods approach. Finally, I reflect on prior research which has successfully utilised a similar design.

Mixed methods research has been defined as research where the researcher collects and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data based on research questions in a single study or phases of a programme of study; mixes, integrates or links the two forms of data; gives priority to one or both forms of data in terms of the emphasis of the research; and combines the procedures into specific research designs which direct the conduct of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009, p. 267) have commented that “[o]nce a study combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to any degree, the study can no longer be viewed as utilizing a monomethod design”. Whilst I am unable here to give a full history of the mixed methods paradigm, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that since its beginning in the late 1950s, it has developed through several stages. They argue that initial interest in mixed methods progressed through a phase of paradigm debate, in which proponents of both qualitative and quantitative research methods argued that their assumptions and practices were incommensurable, and has emerged through a procedural development phase to recent development and expansion where it has grown into the separate methodology seen in the literature today. There are however some critiques of the mixed methods approach. One of the most prevalent criticisms of adopting mixed methods in a single research project is the argument that qualitative and quantitative research methods stem from very different philosophical paradigms. Specifically that quantitative research has its roots in positivism whereas qualitative research grounds itself in constructivist thought,

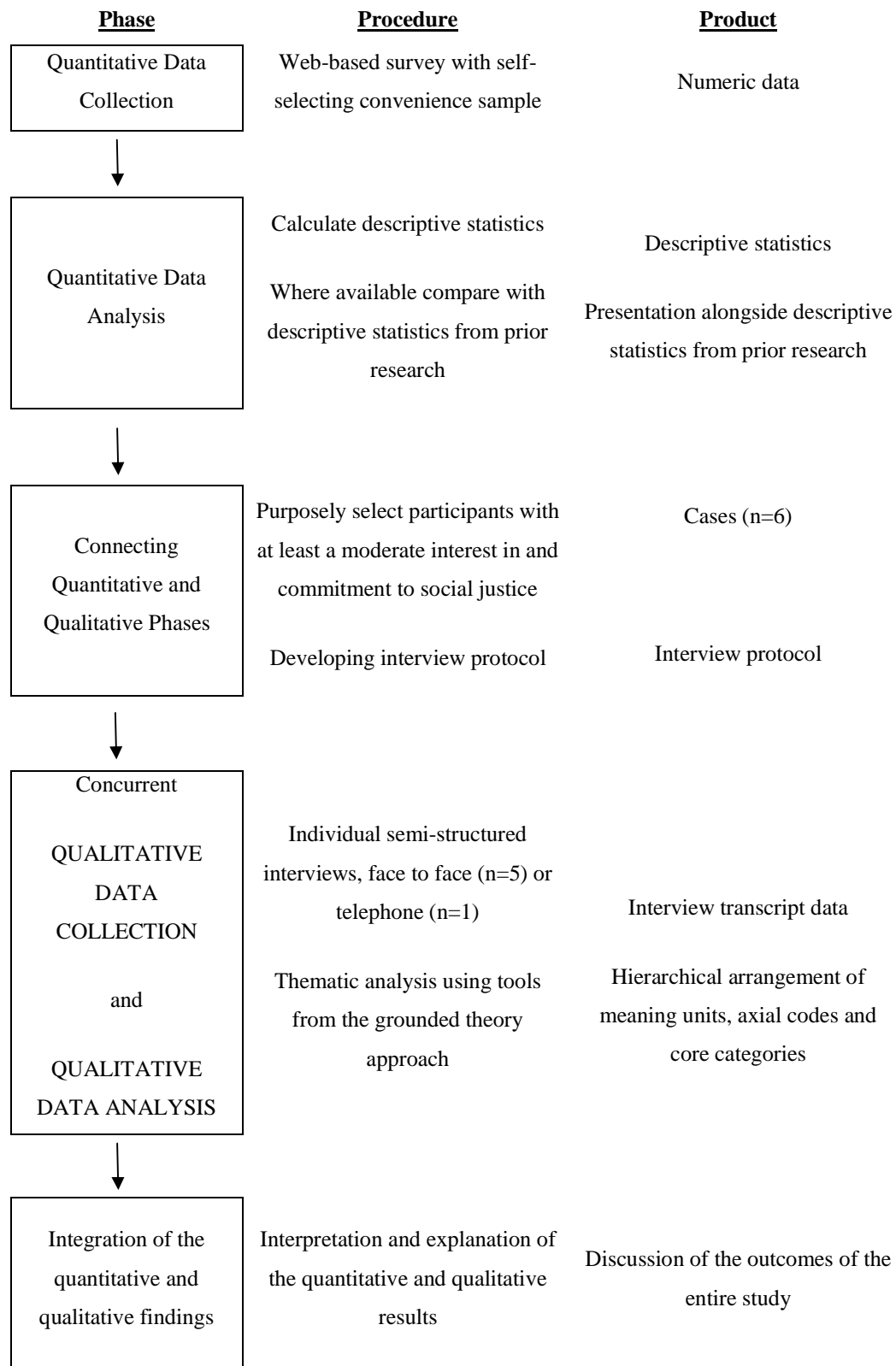
and these two paradigms are incommensurable (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). This argument is summed up in the following quote:

The key issues in the quantitative-qualitative debate are ontological and epistemological. Quantitative researchers perceive truth as something which describes an objective reality, separate from the observer and waiting to be discovered. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the changing nature of reality created through people's experiences – an evolving reality in which the researcher and researched are mutually interactive and inseparable...Because quantitative and qualitative methods represent two different paradigms, they are incommensurate (Sale et al., 2002, p. 50).

This argument has been responded to in a number of ways in the literature. Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins (2009) argue that mixed methods research may be underpinned by the pragmatist paradigm, which rejects the incommensurability hypothesis by arguing that it is not based on observation of real world research, rather it is based on flawed a priori reasoning. They argue therefore that this argument does not hold when applied to real world research. Other arguments have questioned the assumed connections between philosophical paradigms and methods and suggested that there is not for example an inherent connection between a positivist worldview and a quantitative methodological approach (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska & Creswell, 2005). See also section 3.2., above.

In the current research an initial quantitative survey was followed by a qualitative interview phase and the following steps were taken: (a) quantitative data collection; (b) quantitative data analysis; (c) purposive sampling; (d) concurrent qualitative data collection and analysis; and (e) integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings. Following the recommendations of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Ivankova et al. (2006), figure 3 illustrates the mixed methods design. As Guest (2013, p. 146) notes, “[d]iagramming is critical” to illustrate mixed methods designs. In the current research, as the second qualitative phase was considered to be the main focus of the study, it is said that this phase took priority (denoted in the figure by the capitalization of QUALITATIVE as opposed to quantitative). Qualitative priority is both consistent with the aim of the research to explore how social justice was

understood and how a commitment to social justice manifests, and with the participant-selection variant of the design adopted. Connection and integration of the quantitative and qualitative phases occurred at participant selection and at interpretation. During the interpretation phase of the research the quantitative and qualitative approaches were mixed in two ways. Firstly qualitative findings were used to aid understanding and interpretation of the quantitative findings, and secondly the findings of the qualitative phase elaborated on the quantitative findings and aided interpretation of the outcomes of the study as a whole (Ivankova et al., 2006). Therefore, findings from both of the stages were drawn upon when considering the outcomes of the research with regards to the research purpose of exploring the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession.



**Figure 3 – Illustration of the mixed methods design, adapted from Ivankova et al. (2006)**

There are several reasons why a researcher might choose to go beyond purely quantitative or qualitative methods. Some of these have been previously outlined by authors such as Greene et al. (1989) and Bryman (2006). The overarching purpose of the current research was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. There were two purposes for the use of a mixed methods design, which were sampling and complementarity. In the participant-selection variant of the explanatory sequential design adopted here, the primary reason for using a mixed methods approach is sampling (Morgan, 1998). The second qualitative phase functioned as the principle method in the study; the preliminary quantitative phase provided a guide for purposive sampling in the qualitative phase (Morgan, 1998). Furthermore, a mixed methods design was chosen for the purpose of complementarity, which “seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 259). Specifically, the second qualitative phase of the research had the purpose of gathering in-depth qualitative data about the understanding and place of social justice in the profession of counselling psychology with a subsample of participants from the preliminary stage, who rated themselves as having at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice. Similar to the research by Beer et al. (2012) who interviewed activist trainees following a quantitative survey, the decision to focus on this subsample was taken because the qualitative phase aimed to enhance the quantitative findings by exploring individuals’ understandings of the concept of social justice and how a commitment to social justice manifests in counselling psychology. Therefore it was judged to be appropriate to focus on those individuals whose scores on the SIQ indicated a higher level of social justice interest and commitment.

Having considered the reasons for the use of a mixed methods approach in the present study, it is also useful to consider the previous successful use of such designs. Prior research has successfully used a sequential mixed methods design in the area of social justice and counselling psychology. Beer et al. (2012) conducted an initial quantitative survey phase with trainee counselling psychologists, and followed this with a qualitative phase in which they interviewed activist trainees recruited from the quantitative sample. Their overall research purpose was to investigate the

social justice commitments of trainee counselling psychologists. Similar to the study by Beer et al. (2012), in the present research survey responses were used to select interview participants. The main differences between the design used by Beer et al. (2012) and the one adopted here is the level of mixing within the mixed methods approach and the priority given to the two phases. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) have outlined how mixed methods research falls on a continuum from “not mixed” to “fully mixed” The current research utilised a partially mixed methods design, as outlined by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009, p.267):

The major difference between partially mixed methods and fully mixed methods is whereas fully mixed methods involve the mixing of quantitative and qualitative techniques within one or more stages of the research process or across these stages, with partially mixed methods, the quantitative and qualitative phases are not mixed within or across stages. Instead, with partially mixed methods, both the quantitative and qualitative elements are conducted either concurrently or sequentially in their entirety before being mixed at the data interpretation stage.

Beer et al. (2012) had an additional point of data mixing at the data analysis phase, and they aimed to give equal weighting to their quantitative and qualitative phases. Therefore whilst the present study used a partially mixed methods design, their research adopted a fully mixed methods design. In the present research both the quantitative and qualitative elements were conducted completely before the main point of data mixing. In a separate area of study, Ivankova et al. (2006) also used a similar explanatory sequential design in which the second qualitative phase took priority and the research was connected at the points of sampling and interpretation. Therefore prior research has successfully used similar designs.



### **3.4. Method**

As detailed above the research adopted a partially mixed methods design whereby the two phases of the research were carried out in full prior to mixing in the interpretation phase, therefore in the this section of the thesis I present the two phases of the research separately. Specifically, I consider the method of the project chronologically, therefore considering first the preliminary quantitative phase, followed by a discussion of the main focus of the project, the qualitative phase.

#### **3.4.1. Preliminary quantitative phase**

There were two objectives of the initial quantitative phase. The primary objective was to recruit members of the counselling psychology profession with at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice to participate in the subsequent interview phase of the research. Nevertheless, as aforementioned a second purpose was to collect quantitative data on the levels of social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession. No prior research had collected data on this using a UK sample. As mentioned at the start of the current chapter, the preliminary research question was as follows:

What do a self-selecting sample of members of the counselling psychology profession based in the United Kingdom score on the Social Issues Questionnaire?

##### ***(i) Participants***

Twenty-eight participants took part in the online survey. One participant only completed the demographic part of the survey and therefore was not included. This left twenty-seven members of the counselling psychology profession who had completed the online questionnaire to some extent. Inclusion criteria for this stage of the research set out that the participants could be either trainee or qualified counselling psychologists who were currently based in the UK. The majority of participants were trainee counselling psychologists ( $n = 24$ ; 88.9%). Over half identified themselves as White British ( $n = 15$ ; 55.6%). Other participants identified themselves either as White- any other ( $n = 5$ ; 18.5%); Asian/ Asian British –

Pakistani ( $n = 1$ ; 3.7%); Black British – African ( $n = 1$ ; 3.7%); White – Irish ( $n = 2$ ; 7.4%); or other ( $n = 2$ ; 7.4%; these were further specified as Iranian and Malaysian). One participant did not provide their ethnicity (3.7%). Twenty-one participants were female (77.8%) and six were male (22.2%). A third of the participants were between 26-30 years old ( $n = 9$ ; 33.3%). One participant was under 25 years old (3.7%); 2 were between 31 and 35 years old (7.4%); 3 were between 36-40 (11.1%); 3 were between 41-45 (11.1%); 5 were between 46-50 (18.5%); 1 was between 51-55 (3.7%); 2 were between 56-60 years old (7.4%); and 1 participant chose not to disclose their age (3.7%). Two participants only partially completed the questionnaire: one only completed the first subscale; the other did not complete the last subscale. The data on completed subscales were included in the study. See the section below on survey procedure (section 3.4.1(iii)) for details of the sampling strategies used.

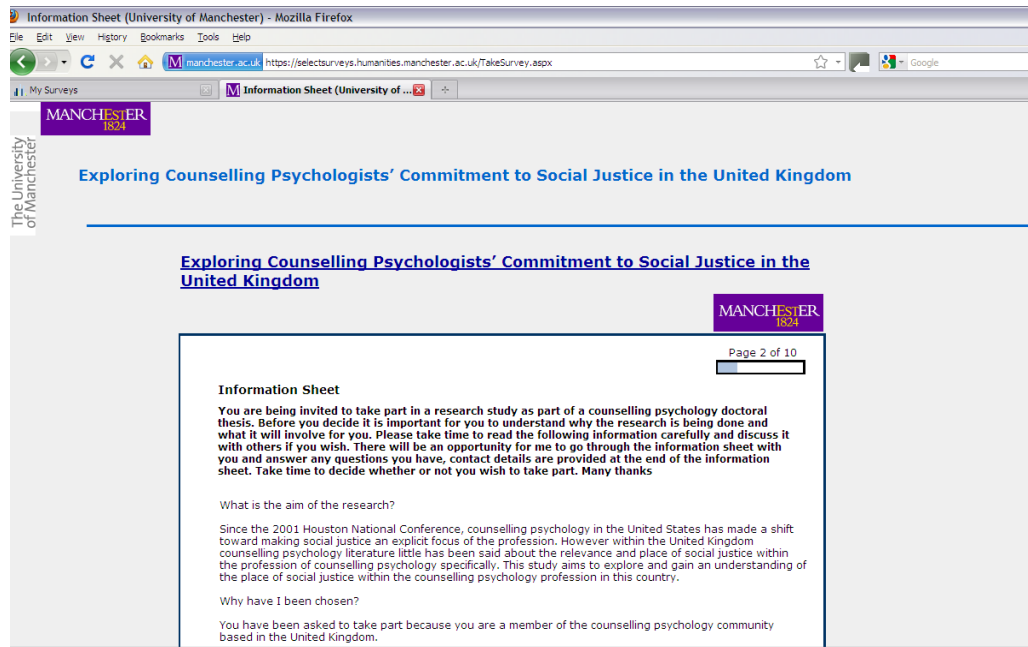
## ***(ii) Measures***

### *Demographics:*

The participants were initially asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire. Information collected included participants' age; ethnicity; gender; and whether they were a trainee or a qualified counselling psychologist.

### *The Social Issues Questionnaire (SIQ; Miller et al., 2009):*

The SIQ aims to collect data on individuals' opinions on issues related to social inequality and engaging in social justice activities. Permission was gained from Matthew Miller to use the SIQ in the current research (Miller, 2011, personal communication). The survey was used in an online format using the University of Manchester Humanities online survey tool at <https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk>. See Figure 4 below for a screen shot of one of the pages of the questionnaire (see Appendix A for further pages).



**Figure 4- Screen shot of the first page of the online Social Issues Questionnaire (SIQ)**

Quantitative data were collected in an online format for a number of reasons. Specifically, using online data collection strategies allows a researcher to include participants from across a wider geographical area than a paper-based survey, it is a cheaper and more environmentally friendly strategy, and it can reduce response time (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). Furthermore, previous research has used the SIQ successfully in an online format, and has achieved good response rates (Miller, 2011, personal communication). The questionnaire has five sections which assess the following areas: domain-specific social justice self-efficacy; outcome expectations; social justice interest; social justice commitment; and perceived supports and barriers (Miller et al., 2009). All subscales are scored by summing the scores on each item of the scale and dividing the result by the number of items on that scale. See Appendix B for a full copy of the SIQ.

### ***(iii) Survey procedure***

Prior to recruitment there was a short pilot phase of the online questionnaire. The web link for the survey was circulated to my research supervisor and 6 trainee counselling psychologists on the University of Manchester Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Two individuals completed the survey, and they were

asked to inform me of any potential issues with it. No problems were highlighted with the questionnaire at this point and so the survey was opened for participants.

The research was advertised in a number of ways, in an attempt to reach as many members of the UK counselling psychology profession as possible. The project was advertised with the British Psychological Society's Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP), in an attempt to reach members of the counselling psychology profession across the UK. The advert was posted on their website with other research adverts and went out on an email to members of the Division (see Appendix C for advert). Additional to this, Programme Directors from all of the professional training courses in counselling psychology in the UK were contacted (see Appendix D for a copy of the text of the email). The email asked them if they would forward the research advert to both trainee and qualified counselling psychologists in their department. Replies to this email were not received from all training courses; the establishments which did reply either informed me that the advert had been posted on a notice board in their department, or it was forwarded out via email. The advert was also circulated to all trainees on the University of Manchester training course via email and an advert was posted on a notice board in the University building.

Reminder emails were sent out approximately 3 months following the initial emails. As part of the survey participants were asked whether or not they consented to be re-contacted if they met the selection criteria for the second phase of the research. Participants who took part in the survey in the first 3 months of it being open and had agreed to be re-contacted were contacted to let them know approximately when they might be contacted about the second phase if they met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix E for a copy of the text of the email). The online survey remained accessible for approximately 6 months, after which the web link was closed.

#### *(iv) Quantitative data analysis*

Data were exported from the University survey software into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program (SPSS 16). Descriptive statistics were calculated for the data from the SIQ. Specifically, for each of the subscales measures of central tendency (mean) and distribution (standard deviation) were calculated.

Following the procedures of data analysis used by Beer et al. (2012) when they considered how trainee counselling psychologists rate their own and their training programmes' social justice commitments, these figures were then compared to findings from prior research using the same questionnaire measure (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011).

### **3.4.2. Qualitative phase**

I now move on to consider the second, qualitative phase of the research, which took priority and was the primary focus of the current project. The aim of this phase was to gather in-depth qualitative data about the understanding and place of social justice in the profession of counselling psychology, with a subsample of participants from the preliminary stage. Participants in this stage were purposely sampled from the pool of participants in the initial quantitative phase who agreed to be re-contacted for the interview phase of research. They were selected because their scores on the SIQ indicated that they rated themselves as having at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice. The aim in this phase of the research was to explore these participants' understandings of social justice, their views on the relevance it has for counselling psychology, and the way in which their commitment to social justice manifests in terms of action. The following research question was considered:

What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice?

#### **(i) *Participants***

Qualitative research aims to collect rich data rather than to sample a representative number of participants (Morrow, 2007). At the outset of the project, a sample of approximately 8-12 participants was hoped for. This was because of typical sample sizes in projects using similar analysis techniques (McLeod, 2001a), the time-scale and limited resources of the project. Inclusion criteria set out that participants had to have scored six or more on the social justice interest subscale and seven or more on the social justice commitment subscale. This decision was made as these scores

indicate a medium-high interest and commitment to social justice, based on the scales used, as the mid-point of each scale is four (Miller et al., 2009). The decision to have a slightly higher requirement on the commitment subscale was due to the different meanings of the scores on the two subscales. On the social justice commitment scale, the mid-point of four indicates that the participant is unsure about engaging in social justice action whereas a score of 6.5 and above would indicate that they agreed that they are committed to engaging in social justice action. A score of seven was therefore judged to indicate a relatively high commitment to social justice. On the social justice interest subscale a score of six is one point below the level which would represent a high interest in social justice, therefore this was judged as an acceptable limit to demonstrate a moderate to high interest in social justice.

Of the 27 participants, 10 individuals' scores demonstrated a medium-high interest and commitment to social justice. One of these had not consent to be re-contacted for the second phase of the research, which left nine individuals to invite for participation in the second phase of the research. Two did not respond to the request for participation, and there was a technical problem with the contact email address provided by a third participant. The final sample therefore included six participants. This included trainee and qualified counselling psychologists, a range of ages, and both males and females. Participants were all based in England. Trainees represented three different training institutions across England. A summary of the demographic details of the participants are provided in Table 1. See also Table 2 for details of the average social justice interest and commitment scores in the final sample in this qualitative phase.

**Table 1 - A summary of the participants' demographic data**

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Qualified status</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Gender</b>
P20	Trainee	White British	Not disclosed	Female
P10	Trainee	White British	46-50	Male
P3	Qualified	White British	41-45	Female
P12	Trainee	White British	26-30	Female
P13	Trainee	White–any other	26-30	Female
P15	Trainee	White Irish	31-35	Male

**Table 2 - Social justice interest and commitment of the qualitative sample**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Social justice interest</b>	6.83	0.75	6
<b>Social justice commitment</b>	7.67	0.82	6

***(ii) Researcher***

As part of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research it is recommended that the researcher makes his or her assumptions and background explicit to the audience of his or her research (Morrow, 2005; see below section on trustworthiness, section 3.4.2(vi)). Within this section I therefore present brief information on my thoughts and background in relation to the topic of this research. Making my preconceptions transparent has two intended functions: to help contain the influence of my assumptions, and to provide readers with the information in order to add to their evaluation of the study (Rennie et al., 1988; Kasket, 2012). I chose to research social justice in counselling psychology for my thesis initially because of an interest in both social issues and their impact on mental health, and an interest in the identity of counselling psychology. I am a white middle class female from the UK, and although I have personal experience of seeing the impact of unemployment on those I care about, I have never experienced poverty, or indeed, extreme oppression or

discrimination. I have however developed over the course of the past ten years an interest in social issues, matters of inequality, the distribution of wealth and access to resources and opportunities across society. On a professional level I have found that this impacts my work by making me passionate about the importance of equal access to health care (including mental health and counselling services) which is free at the point of delivery. This means that I am opposed to counselling psychology services being offered to individuals on the basis of their wealth or social class. I also value autonomy highly, and therefore in my therapeutic work I see it as vitally important to emphasise client agency and choice. Hopefully these factors would not be the sole determinant of my opinions and perspective; nevertheless they will no doubt have an impact on my understanding of the world and therefore need to be made transparent in the presentation of this research, in order for the reader to be able to assess the extent they think they may have impacted on the current research (Morrow, 2007). Within the appendices of this project I have presented the main assumptions and biases I held about the topic of enquiry (see Appendix J). I outline how I hope to have managed any potential impacts my assumptions may have had on the research project in section 3.4.2(iv), below.

### *(iii) Interview protocol*

The interview protocol used here had a semi-structured approach, which was chosen in order to maintain a clear focus on the central interest of the research whilst allowing for a level of flexibility and openness to the individuals' experience (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Therefore, although an interview protocol was developed and used with all participants, a level of flexibility was included. This allowed for clarification of participants' meanings to ensure accurate understanding of their experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The protocol was developed following a series of steps outlined in Spong (2011). Interview questions were first created which I considered might help illuminate different aspects of the research question. Some questions explicitly connected the questionnaire to the interview, with the aim of elaborating on the questionnaire phase, such as 'One of the items on the social justice commitment scale of the questionnaire was 'In the future I intend to engage in social justice activities'. I wondered have you considered what sorts of social justice action you might be involved in?' After this, prompts or probes were included to



follow up any questions which were designed to be used when necessary to prompt elaboration by the participant. The pool of questions were then put into sections based on their focus and ordered, with the aim being to move from general to specific questions in an order which made logical sense. Finally the questions were checked to see if they were ambiguous or biased (Spong, 2011). This final step was achieved by circulating the interview protocol to my research supervisor, whose comments were acted upon resulting in a re-draft of the interview protocol. In addition to this, I took part in a bracketing interview where I was interviewed using the intended interview protocol by a colleague with previous experience of conducting qualitative research interviews (see section on qualitative trustworthiness below for further information). Prior research has used bracketing interviews in order to help access assumptions and values which may impact on the research (Rolls & Relf, 2006). An additional objective for the use of the bracketing interview in the present project was the opportunity to experience how the interview questions worked in practice. Following the bracketing interview, a pilot interview was scheduled with one of the 6 participants discussed above. This individual was chosen because they were based in Manchester and a pilot interview could therefore be arranged relatively easily. After the interview I reflected on my perception of any potential issues with the conducting the interview or the interview questions. This primarily involved writing my thoughts in my reflexive journal. Furthermore the pilot interview was discussed with my supervisor in a supervision meeting. The interview protocol was not changed following the pilot and the data were retained for analysis. See Appendix F for a copy of the final interview protocol.

#### *(iv) Procedure*

After having been identified using the procedure detailed above, participants were invited to take part in the interview phase of the research. They were sent a copy of the information sheet asked if they were still willing to participate (see Appendix G for a copy of the information sheet; and Appendix H for email text). If they were happy to do so, they were asked to inform me of their availability and their preferred location for the interview. Although it was stated that ideally interviews would be conducted face to face, I offered the option of telephone interviews. Five interviews were conducted face to face, and one was conducted over the phone. The interview

was planned to last roughly one hour, and in practice they lasted between 50 and 80 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The telephone interview was audio recorded using an analogue adapter connecting the phone to the recorder. Following initial analyses, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in a member check process which involved checking a list of initial categories and the corresponding meaning units from the transcript of their interview. See section 3.4.2(vi), below, for further information on this process and also see Appendix I for the member check documentation.

#### **(v) *Qualitative data analysis***

The qualitative data was analysed using techniques taken from the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although primarily designed to generate theory, Corbin and Strauss state in the preface to their seminal text *Basics of Qualitative Research* that the methods they set out can be used effectively in cases where theory building is not the aim (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the present study, techniques from the grounded theory approach were chosen because they are a useful method for generating themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, this method of data analysis is popular in a number of fields and shows particular promise in the field of counselling psychology research because of the rigorous procedures which have been developed (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark & Morales, 2007; Fassinger, 2005). Qualitative data analysis has, at least in the past perhaps, had a reputation of being unsystematic and lacking in clarity and rigour (see Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). It could be argued that there is greater ambiguity and bias present in qualitative analysis procedures than in quantitative methods, and this position forms part of the argument against qualitative research from the point of view of some quantitative researchers (for a discussion on the issue of interpretation of data as a threat to qualitative validity, see Yeh and Inman, 2007). I have attempted here to present clearly the steps involved in the qualitative analysis which I undertook (see Table 3, below): to clearly outline elements which can be, and to be transparent about areas of the analysis process where there is ambiguity or potential bias. In order to do this, this section outlines the approach step by step, whilst attempting to ground the approach in the relevant literature and theory. Initially however I introduce the grounded theory approach.

**Table 3 - Process of qualitative data analysis**

1. Read through transcript
2. Divided transcript text up into units of meaning
3. Meaning unit was assigned a concept label for reference
4. Meaning unit was assigned to a category
5. New meaning units were compared to all categories generated and assigned to a category/ categories by either (a) assigning to previously generated category or (b) creating new category
6. Repeat step 5 for all of the data in transcripts
7. Categories were grouped together into axial codes
8. Axial codes grouped together into core categories

Grounded theory was initially outlined by the sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, published in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory approach has since been described as the “market leader’ in qualitative research” (McLeod, 2001a, p.70). Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of the history of the approach and the much discussed split between Glaser and Strauss (Walker & Myrick, 2006), but it is important to note that the theory and techniques have been significantly developed and taken in different directions by the two authors since its inception in 1967 (see Glaser, 1978; 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Additional to this, other authors have made their own adaptations and developments of the grounded theory method (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Rennie et al., 1988). There has also been some debate about which paradigm the grounded theory approach falls into, with authors such as Ponterotto (2005) arguing that grounded theory should be considered a constructivist approach, whereas Fassinger (2005) argues that it may fall into either a post-structuralist or a post-positivist paradigm. Holton (2007) instead argues that grounded theory is a separate paradigm, distinct from qualitative and quantitative approaches and that it “...can adapt any epistemological perspective appropriate to the data and the ontological stance of the research” (p. 269).

One point which is worth noting is the different viewpoints of grounded theory as a method of data analysis and the grounded theory methodology. Holton (2007) reflects this distinction in her discussion of the coding process in grounded theory:

My stance is not in opposition to qualitative research, nor do I wish to suggest that classic grounded theory is a preferred or superior methodology. It is simply a different methodology, a distinct paradigm with its own principles and procedures for what constitutes valid research within this paradigm. For a classic grounded theorist, those studies done within the traditional paradigm of qualitative research and labelled as grounded theory frequently fall short of the criteria of a classic grounded theory. From the perspective of a classic grounded theorist they have been remodelled to meet the criteria of the traditional, and dominant, qualitative paradigm...Recognizing this distinction is important in advancing methodological scholarship within both paradigms (p. 267)

In this quote Holton illustrates the distinction between the grounded theory methodology and the use of grounded theory techniques within a different methodological approach. Within the current study, grounded theory techniques were utilised within a mixed methods approach; therefore a classic grounded theory methodology as discussed for example by Holton (2007) was not adopted.

Due to the various developments and different forms of the grounded theory approach, it is difficult to define 'grounded theory', and some of the confusion in the area relates to the different perspectives of different 'schools' of the grounded theory approach. Nevertheless it is possible to provide some general information regarding grounded theory. In its original form, the aim of grounded theory was to create a theory. McLeod (2001a) summarizes:

First, the key task of the researcher is to 'discover' new ways of making sense of the social world. Second the goal of analysis is to generate a 'theory', a formal framework for understanding the phenomenon being investigated. Third, this theory should be 'grounded' in the data rather than being imposed on it. (p. 70)

Nevertheless as mentioned above, in later work (of Strauss at least) it was suggested that grounded theory techniques may be used where theory building is not the aim (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory is usually described as a systematic, qualitative approach which sets out a full and detailed set of procedures used to analyse data. Indeed, the approach has been described as a “systematic, inductive approach” (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 140). Both the systematic and the inductive nature of the approach appear to be two fundamental tenets of the method, as these sentiments can be found across the literature (McLeod, 2001a; Walker & Myrick, 2006). Furthermore, proponents emphasise the importance of the findings or themes being *grounded* in the data, consistent with the name of the method (Rennie et al., 1988). This inductive method is generally held in contrast to methods of data analysis such as thematic analysis; however Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested that thematic analysis can be either theoretical (and therefore driven by the researcher’s analytic interests), or inductive (and therefore bears some resemblance to grounded theory methods).

Despite being the “‘market leader’ in qualitative research” (McLeod, 2001a, p.70), there have been a number of criticisms of the grounded theory method. Fassinger (2005) has written that the approach is criticised both from quantitative researchers who view it as insufficiently systematic, as well as from postmodern qualitative researchers who critique the post-positivist elements of the approach. An example of the latter comes from West (2001, p. 128), who reflects on his experience of using grounded theory and feeling that when coding the data that “some holistic totality was being broken down and lost”. He argues that something is lost in the process of data analysis set out by grounded theory, and suggests that one of the limitations of the approach is the assumption that there is one objective reality which any researcher given the same data may discover. Along a similar vein, Thomas and James (2006) suggest that

There is a central problem in the search for grounded theory. It is that there is no untethered spirit existing in the minds of researchers which will enable them neutrally and inertly to lay some cognitive framework over the data they collect to allow them to draw ‘theory’ dispassionately from this data, this ground. (p. 734)

The major critiques presented against the grounded theory approach therefore mainly lie with the philosophy of the approach, and the “quasi-scientific approach” (West, 2001, p. 127). An additional criticism lies with the diverse understanding and applications of ‘grounded theory’ as mentioned previously. Authors such as Cutcliffe (2000) warn that a researcher may risk losing precision in her analysis if she is not explicit about the exact nature of the grounded theory approach she adopted. Consequently, having introduced the grounded theory approach more broadly, I will now describe the specific process of data analysis undertaken here.

Initially the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, following which the transcriptions were entered into the computer program NVivo 9 in order to conduct the analysis (for a brief discussion of the debate around using computers in grounded theory analyses see Fassinger, 2005. See also Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As with much research adopting grounded theory methods, the process of data analysis ran concurrent with data collection (McLeod, 2001a). Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 163) recommend that “[a]nalysts should begin the coding soon after the first interview or observation/video is completed”. The decision to undertake concurrent data analysis and collection was taken here in order to analyse the data when the interview was ‘fresh’ in my mind, and for pragmatic reasons relating to the time required for completion of the project. The first stage of data analysis involved open coding, described by Fassinger (2005) as the process of breaking the transcription down into units of meaning. Glaser (1978) recommends that the researcher code the transcript line by line. Similarly, Holton (2007) emphasizes the importance of line by line coding, suggesting that it ensures that no important categories are missed and that it forces the researchers to saturate categories. However, following the recommendations of Rennie et al. (1988), interview transcripts were coded initially for ‘meaning units’ rather than a procedure of line-by-line coding. Each unit of meaning was given a concept label, which aimed to summarize the meaning of the segment. Where appropriate meaning units were coded in vivo. See Table 4 below for examples of meaning units and their corresponding concept labels. Meaning units can range in size from several words to two pages, but are most often several lines (Fassinger, 2005). Although this potentially leaves me open to an argument that this process lessens the degree of rigour involved in the analytic procedure, I judged that

coding the transcript line by line would mean sacrificing some of the intended meaning of the data. This is because the line by line method may require cutting across the intended meaning of a statement which, for example, might span across two or three lines of transcript (see Rennie & Fergus, 2006; Lowndes & Hanley, 2010).

**Table 4 - Examples to illustrate the process of open coding**

Meaning unit	Concept label
And I think that's kind of, links back to what I said at the very beginning, that we need to see the human being in the person	Need to see the human being in the person
yeah, one of the, one of the groups that I used to work with quite a well a lot, their phrase was 'nothing about us without us' and I fully subscribe to that. If I don't know about an issue then I'm not in a position to be talking about it with any degree of you know I would hate to think that anything that I said would influence something in the wrong way. So there is that reticence as well. I wouldn't want to be getting involved with anything that I didn't know what the issues were. Helping moving and change things in a way that the people that are actually having the experiences want it change; otherwise we're just part of the problem. Much more about empowering and support.	Nothing about us without us
To not close our eyes	To not close our eyes

A process of constant comparison is an important part of analysis using grounded theory techniques. This involves a simultaneous process of coding for meaning units

and comparison across categories. Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 134) provide us with a useful definition of this phase of analysis:

As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed.

The meaning units were grouped together and the categories were continually modified and adjusted based on new data:

These coded units of meaning are compared to other coded units of meaning, the concepts gradually being grouped together into categories that encompass those concepts. As additional data are gathered, coded concepts continue to be compared to existing data and (re)categorized; the categories constantly undergo modification to incorporate new information and are continually interrogated for coherence and explanatory capacity (Fassinger, 2005, p. 160).

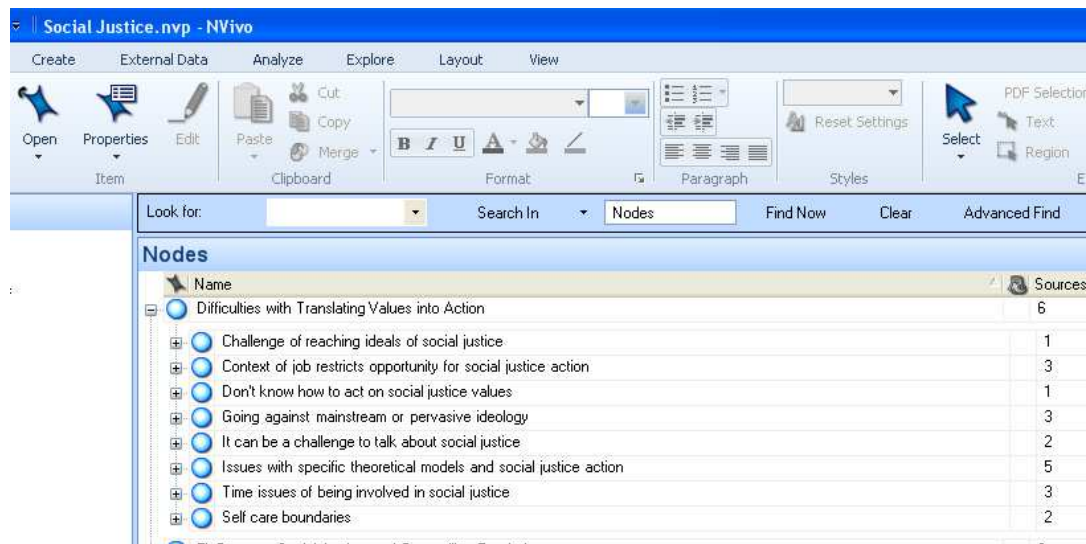
The judgement on whether a meaning unit was to be grouped with an existing unit was made by asking whether it 'looks like' or 'feels like' the meaning of the existing codes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Meaning units were assigned to more than one category where appropriate (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Rennie, 1998). Where meaning units were judged to be outside of the context of the research, they were coded in a 'miscellaneous' category and were assessed against the categories at the end of the analytic procedure (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Following open coding, a process of axial coding was undertaken in order to develop relationships between the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Fassinger (2005, p. 160) has described this stage of the analysis as being where:

relationships among categories are organized and further explicated, grouping them into more encompassing (key) categories that subsume several (sub)categories: thus, axial coding puts the fractured data back together in the form of categories and their interrelationships



Similarly, Rennie (1998, p. 103) describes how in grounded theory projects typically the analysis process proceeds through higher orders of abstraction, where “categories may be grouped according to a meaning that unites them”. Therefore this part of analysis involved looking at the categories (which included within them a number of meaning units, referred to by their concept labels) and grouping similar categories together into higher order categories, which were again given labels. See Figure 5, below, for a screen shot of an example of developing preliminary higher order categories in the process of axial coding.



**Figure 5 - Screen shot of preliminary higher order category (example of axial coding)**

The final stage was to generate a core category. The different variants of the grounded theory process of analysis all describe the development of a core category in the data (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The development of a core category has been referred to as ‘selective coding’ (Fassinger, 2005). Nevertheless it is important to note that the terminology is dependent on the specific variant of grounded theory analysis (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The process of developing a core category is suggested to be the process by which all of the categories are brought together, and in doing so a story is generated which explains the most important aspects of the data, describing the categories and their relationships to the core story (Fassinger, 2005). The core category relates to as many of the categories as possible, reoccurs

frequently in the data and is a stable pattern relating to other variables (Holton, 2007).

*(vi) Qualitative trustworthiness*

Qualitative trustworthiness is considered a standard of quality in qualitative research, akin to the concept of validity in quantitative research (Elliott et al., 1999; Morrow, 2005; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Criteria for trustworthiness have been set out by a number of authors, for example Elliott et al. (1999) outlined their evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research, which included: ‘owning one’s perspective’; ‘situating the sample’; ‘grounding in examples’; ‘providing credibility checks’; ‘coherence’; ‘accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks’; and ‘resonating with readers’. More recently, Williams and Morrow (2009) present a pan-paradigmatic perspective on achieving trustworthiness and emphasise the importance of three major categories of trustworthiness: ‘integrity of the data’; ‘balance between reflexivity and subjectivity’; and ‘clear communication of findings’.

Within the research I was both the interviewer and an ‘insider’ with respect to the topic of enquiry, as I am member of the counselling psychology profession in the UK (Morrow, 2005). There are both positive and negative implications to being an insider-researcher. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) discuss how being an insider allows you to have a starting point of commonality with research participants. This may facilitate trust and acceptance, which might result in participants sharing more information with you as the insider-researcher. Nevertheless, they also reflect on how as an insider-researcher it is possible to make assumptions about the level of shared experience, and instead of representing the participant’s experience, the researcher’s experience may impede on the process of data collection and analysis (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Several measures were taken to optimize the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collection and analysis within the current project, and to limit as far as possible, the impact of my assumptions and biases as the researcher on the data. This included keeping a reflexive journal; taking part in an initial bracketing interview prior to data collection; member checks with the participants of the qualitative phase of the research (credibility check); a coherency

check; and transparency in the presentation of the project. I will now briefly discuss each of these measures in turn.

Firstly, throughout the research project I kept a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts and feelings in relation to the project. Keeping a research journal can help a researcher maintain a reflexive stance (Tufford & Newman, 2012). One of the aims of the journal can be to elucidate any assumptions or preconceptions which might be unconsciously imposed on the data; that is to say keeping a reflexive journal may aid the bracketing process. Bracketing in research, a process in phenomenological research often attributed to Edmund Husserl, refers to the process whereby “any preconceptions or beliefs held by the researcher should be examined, acknowledged and then put to one side” (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 473). Nevertheless, as Rolls and Relf (2006) point out, keeping a journal may not be wholly successful in this regard because due to its private nature, writing alone may not bring any preconscious assumptions into awareness. To add a second measure therefore I took part in a preliminary bracketing interview with the aim of elucidating my assumptions and feelings in relation to the interview topic of social justice. Furthermore, it is important to note that there has been a great deal of debate on the ability of a researcher to ‘bracket’ his or her assumptions (see Lowes & Prowse, 2001 for example). See Appendix J for a list of the main biases and assumptions which were highlighted, including extracts taken from my research diary in order to illustrate these.

Following the qualitative interviews I offered participants the opportunity to review the themes found from the initial data analysis as a form of member check (Williams & Morrow, 2009). This functioned as a credibility check as described by Elliott et al. (1999), as it involved checking my understanding of the data with the participants themselves. This was done by sending participants a list of initial categories and the corresponding meaning units from the transcript of their interview. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which the categories made sense to them, and how accurately the categories reflected their intended meaning in the interview on five point scales. The five point scale for these questions were as follows: 1 = ‘The categories do not make sense to me’ 3= ‘The categories make some sense to me’ 5= ‘The categories make complete sense to me’; and 1 = ‘Not at all accurate’ 3 =

‘Adequately accurate’ 5 = ‘Very accurate’. They were also asked for comments on both of these questions as well as on the initial analysis in general. See Appendix I for the member check documentation. Returned member checks were considered as part of the analysis process. For example, where a participant had noted that a specific concept label did not denote their intended meaning accurately, the concept label of the meaning unit was amended consistent with this. A summary of the responses from the member check can be found in Appendix K.

Another of the criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research projects described by Elliott et al. (1999) was coherence. This refers to achieving a coherent storyline, framework or structure for the phenomenon under study, whilst preserving the nuances in the data. At the end of the process of data analysis I took part in a check for coherence with my research supervisor, which involved talking through each of the categories in the data, with the aim of ensuring that the categories made sense to someone external to the research. Finally, I have aimed to be transparent in the presentation of my social positioning, preconceptions and assumptions, with the hope that this allows the reader to understand my worldview and my relationship with the subject of the research (Morrow, 2007). In the above section (‘Researcher’, section 3.4.2(ii)) I have presented my understanding and interest in the topic of the research. Furthermore, in order to be transparent and add to the trustworthiness of the research, I have provided the reader with a list of the main biases and assumptions I highlighted as part of the research process, and extracts from my research diary (see Appendix J).

### **3.5. Ethical issues**

There were a number of ethical issues to consider within the current project. Within this section I hope to outline what those issues were and what procedures were put in place to address them. Ethical approval for the research was given by the School of Education at the University of Manchester, and the research was carried out in line with the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2011) and was informed by the Health and Care Professions Council's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2008).

As detailed above, the preliminary part of the research involved collecting quantitative survey data in an online format. Therefore it was necessary to follow the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Psychological Research Online (BPS, 2007). Participants were directed to read a full information sheet which detailed what was involved in the research, prior to beginning the questionnaire (see Appendix L for information sheet). This information sheet contained details about the research as well as both my contact details and my research supervisor's contact details. This is the traditional method of acquiring informed consent in both online and non-online research, but a potential problem with this process in online research is that the participants may not have read the information and there is no face to face opportunity to check out the level of understanding before proceeding with data collection (BPS, 2007). Nevertheless as the BPS guidelines set out, where a participant skips through the information and goes onto the research, having only nominally given 'informed' consent, they have made a choice not to read the information (BPS, 2007). Further, as in this research the questionnaire which followed the information sheet was judged to contain no sensitive material, the risk of participants doing this was deemed acceptable. Finally, the online questionnaire format allowed for the participants to withdraw from the research at any point when completing the research, without having to give a reason for their withdrawal.

In the second phase of the research, participants were again provided with a detailed information sheet prior to giving their consent to participate and signed a consent form (see Appendix G for information sheet and Appendix M for consent form). The

interviews were semi-structured and the participants were informed as part of the interview protocol that they were free to withdraw at any time, and they were free to state if there were any specific questions which they did not want to answer, without having to give a reason. They were also given information about the aims and process of the research at the start of the interview (see Appendix F for interview protocol). Process consent was also considered (Haverkamp, 2005) and I monitored the participants' consent throughout the interview, by looking for any cues of discomfort. If there was any doubt that the participant was happy to consent they were reminded that they were free to withdraw at any point. Following the interview the participants had the chance to ask any questions they had about the project. Participants were provided with the contact details of my research supervisor and informed that if they had any concerns about the research and did not feel comfortable speaking with me, they could contact my supervisor.

Confidentiality was also an important consideration. All electronic data in the project were kept in encrypted files and any paper copies of data were kept in locked storage. As part of the initial questionnaire phase, participants were asked to provide their name and a contact email address if they were happy to be re-contacted for the second stage of the research. The online survey was on a secure site, and data could only be accessed with the username and password. Questionnaire data were identified by a number and stored separately to the list of names and contacts. The list of names and contact details were kept in an encrypted electronic file. Within the information participants' received they were informed that responses on the questionnaire would only be matched to a participant's name if the responses met the criteria for selection for the second phase of the research. Furthermore, participants in the interview stage were informed that their data would be anonymised as part of the research project and any quotes used would not be identifiable. Where there was any doubt that a quote might be identifiable in some way, I checked with the relevant participant that they were comfortable with the quote being used.

### **3.6. Chapter summary**

Within this chapter I have laid out the design of the current project. Specifically I began by outlining my epistemological positioning in order to ground the current research project. I set out that my epistemological beliefs can be regarded for the purposes of this research as akin to post-positivism, which argues that there is an objective reality which we can attempt to know, if only probabilistically (Ponterotto, 2005). Whilst post-positivistic research is associated traditionally with quantitative methods, qualitative approaches are also used. I further argued that the research question rather than solely the epistemological beliefs of the researcher, should direct methodological decisions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Gorard, 2004). Given the research questions, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, arose from a consideration of the previous research in this area, a mixed-methods design was adopted. Within this chapter I have described how this mixed-methods design, namely a participant-selection variant of the explanatory sequential design, came to life in the current project. I have therefore outlined step by step the procedure involved at each stage, with reference to sampling, measures, and analysis. These have been considered within separate sections for the preliminary quantitative and the qualitative phases of the research. I have concluded this chapter with reference to the potential ethical issues which were present in the research, and how I attempted to manage them.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the findings of the research, which are divided into main two sections. As detailed above, the research adopted a partially mixed methods design whereby the two phases of the research were carried out in full prior to mixing occurring in the interpretation phase. Therefore in this section of the thesis I again present the two phases of the research separately. To remind the reader, the overall purpose of the research was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the UK counselling psychology profession, and the research questions considered were as follows:

1. What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice? (Priority qualitative research question)
2. What do a self-selecting sample of members of the counselling psychology profession based in the United Kingdom score on the Social Issues Questionnaire? (Preliminary quantitative research question)

Although the first research question is the priority in the present research, the findings will be presented chronologically for the reader, therefore the second of the two research questions is considered first. Initially therefore, I present the findings from the preliminary quantitative phase of the research in which participants completed an electronic version of the Social Issues Questionnaire (Miller et al., 2009). Descriptive statistics are presented alongside those from previous research which has used this measure. Following this, I describe the findings from the qualitative phase of the project, in which semi-structured interview data were analysed using techniques from the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Rennie et al., 1988).



## 4.2. Preliminary quantitative findings

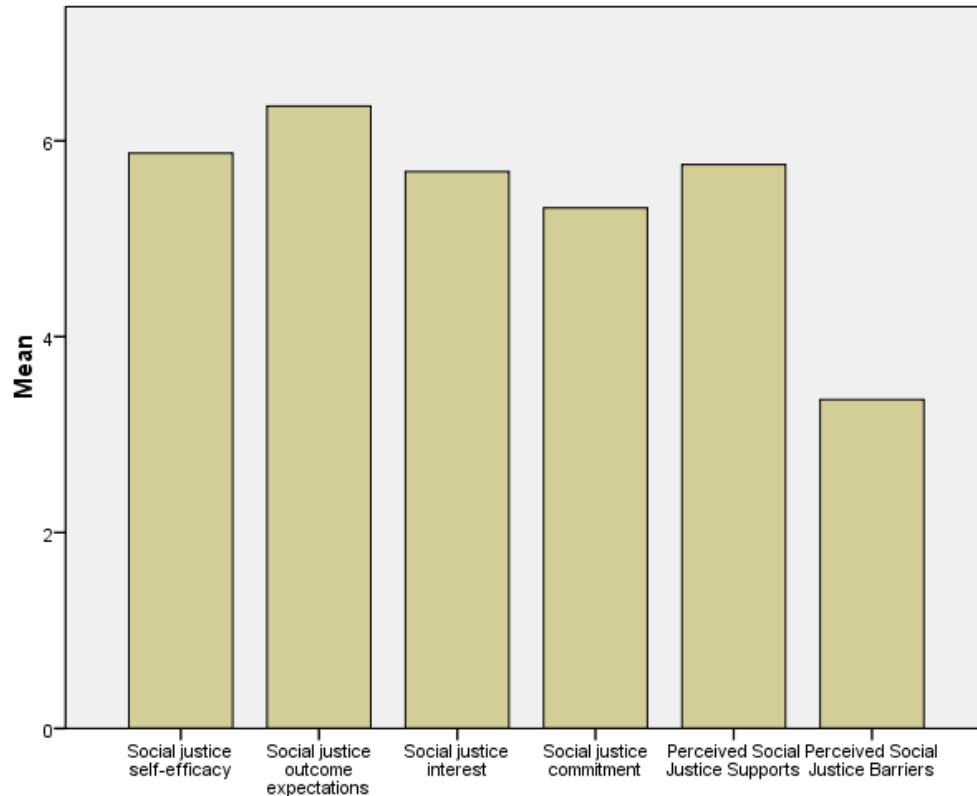
Within this preliminary quantitative phase of the research two forms of analysis were undertaken. Initially, descriptive statistics of the survey data were examined and graphic analyses were generated to represent the findings. Secondly, following the procedure of Beer et al. (2012), the findings were compared to those found in the other two published papers which report data collected using the SIQ. This section of the findings is structured to represent these two aspects of the analysis.

### 4.2.1. Descriptive statistics of the survey data

An overview of the descriptive statistics is presented in Table 5. Also see Figure 6 for a graphic representation of these average scores. Within this section I will elaborate on these findings.

**Table 5 - Summary of descriptive statistics on the Social Issues Questionnaire**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	5.61	1.68	27
<b>Outcome Expectations</b>	6.32	1.41	26
<b>Interest</b>	5.61	1.64	26
<b>Commitment</b>	5.18	2.28	26
<b>Perceived Supports</b>	5.78	1.73	24
<b>Perceived Barriers</b>	3.42	1.53	24

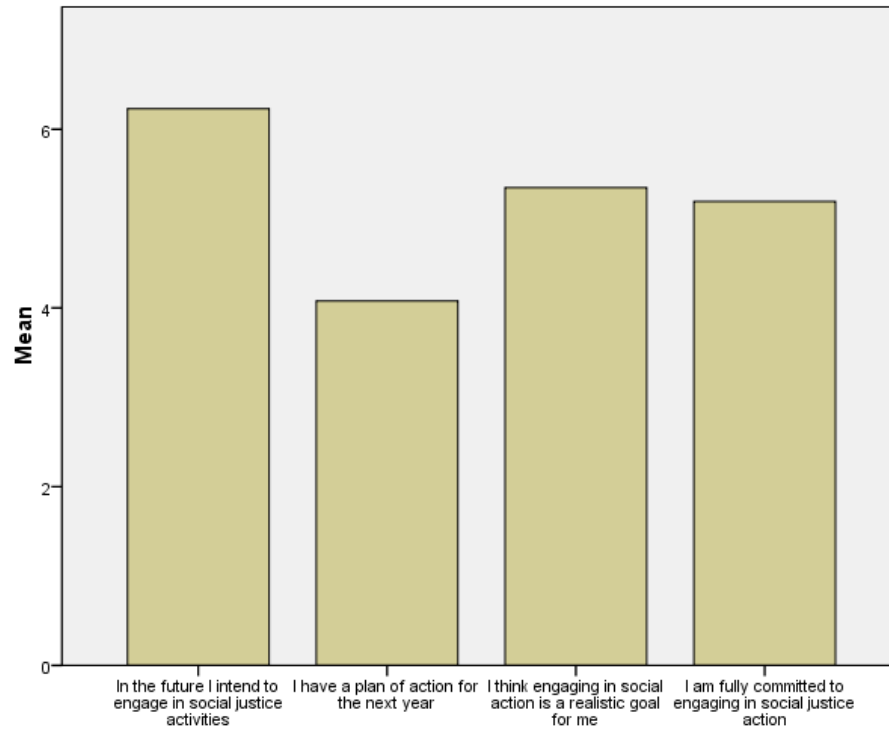


**Figure 6 - Mean scores on the Social Issues Questionnaire subscales**

Firstly, it is a finding in itself that there was a low response rate in this preliminary stage of the research; only 27 members of the counselling psychology profession participated and completed the SIQ. Of these 27 participants, only 24 individuals completed all subscales of the questionnaire.

Participants on average reported a moderate confidence in their ability to engage in social justice action, as indicated by a mean score of 5.61 on the social justice self-efficacy subscale. In relation to participants' outcome expectations, the counselling psychologists who completed the survey on average agreed that if they participated in social justice action the outcome would be positive. This was the highest mean score across the subscales. The findings indicated that the counselling psychologists surveyed had moderate levels of social justice interest: on the scale of 0-9 the mean social justice interest score was 5.61. This is just below the score of 6 mentioned in the methodology chapter as referring to a moderate interest in social justice. As

mentioned in the methodology chapter, higher scores represented higher levels of interest in social justice issues. In relation to social justice commitment, defined as one's intentions to engage in social justice action, participants scored on average a relatively low commitment to social justice: with a mean of 5.18. More specifically, a score of 5 to any of the questions on this subscale denoted that the participant was unsure whether or not they agreed with the statements, therefore an average score of 5.18 can be taken to indicate a level of uncertainty about commitment to engage in social justice action. It is notable here that the standard deviation on the social justice commitment subscale was large ( $SD = 2.28$ ) indicating a wide variation in responses across the participants. Some participants scored as low as 1 on this subscale, with others also scoring the highest possible of 9. Figure 7, below represents the answers to the individual questions on the social justice commitment subscale, and illustrates how on average participants agreed more highly with the statement 'In the future I intend to engage in social justice activities' than the other elements of social justice commitment, particularly 'I have a plan of action for ways I will remain or become involved in social justice activities over the next year'.



**Figure 7 - Mean scores to individual items on the social justice commitment subscale of the Social Issues Questionnaire**

#### ***4.2.2. Comparison to previous studies using the Social Issues Questionnaire***

As this questionnaire has only been used previously in two published studies (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011), and has not been used before with participants from the UK counselling psychology profession, scores were also compared to previous research conducted in the US by Matthew Miller and colleagues. As the primary subscales of interest were the participants' social justice interest and commitment, these are the two which have been compared to prior research.

**Table 6 - Social justice interest and commitment scores across studies using the Social Issues Questionnaire**

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Participants
<b>Current study</b>	<b>Interest</b>	5.61	1.64	26
	<b>Commitment</b>	5.18	2.28	
<b>Miller et al. (2009)</b>	<b>Interest</b>	5.94	1.77	274
	<b>Commitment</b>	4.60	2.05	
<b>Miller &amp; Sendrowitz (2011)</b>	<b>Interest</b>	7.89	1.29	229
	<b>Commitment</b>	7.84	1.75	

As can be seen in Table 6, participants in the current study scored approximately two points lower on the social justice interest and social justice commitment subscales than participants in the study conducted by Miller and Sendrowitz in 2011. The participants in Miller and Sendrowitz (2011) were counselling psychology trainees based in the US. In contrast, participants in the current study scored more similarly to those included in Miller et al. (2009), scoring slightly lower on the social justice interest subscale and approximately one point higher on the social justice commitment subscale. The sample in Miller et al. (2009) included college students in the US who weren't necessarily training to be psychologists. The authors report that participants came from general education, counselling and psychology courses at undergraduate level which are taken on numerous academic majors including accounting, art, biology, business, economics, information science, linguistics, maths, psychology, public policy, sociology and urban studies (Miller et al., 2009).

### **4.3. Qualitative findings**

Within the qualitative phase of the research, data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using techniques from the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Rennie et al., 1988). The following research question was posed:

What can we learn about the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology from members of the counselling psychology profession who have a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice?

Although this has already been discussed at length in the methodology chapter I will remind the reader specifically what the analysis process involved. The transcripts were initially coded for units of meaning, and these meaning units were assigned to categories (open codes). Meaning units ranged from a couple of words of the transcript to approximately fifteen lines of the text. The method of constant comparison was utilised, meaning that the process of coding for meaning units and assigning them to categories ran concurrently; as each new meaning unit was generated it was compared to all the previously generated categories and either assigned to one of these existing categories or to a new category where appropriate. After all of the meaning units had been assigned to categories in this way, a process of axial coding was undertaken whereby categories generated at the initial stage were grouped together into higher order categories (axial codes). The final stage involved determining a core category within the data, within which all categories could be assigned.

I have divided the following presentation of qualitative findings into three sections in which I aim to guide the reader through the different layers of the findings. Initially, I describe the two core categories generated, which form the top and most abstract level of the analysis. I then move on in the second and third sections to focus on these core categories individually and in doing so I discuss each of the subcategories (axial codes) within them, giving the reader an overview of the categories (open codes) within them. At this level of the analysis I illustrate the open codes using

direct quotes from participants, in order to ground the findings in examples (Elliott et al., 1999). To preserve anonymity I have referred to individual participants using ‘they’ to serve as a gender neutral third person singular pronoun. Although I am unable due to word constraints to consider in depth each of the open codes, I attempt to give an overview of the core findings and a full list of all categories with the number of meaning units contained within them can be found in the tables within each section.

#### **4.3.1. The core categories**

Two core categories were generated: (1) ‘Counselling psychologists’ understandings of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it’ and (2) ‘Counselling psychologists’ reflections on social justice action’. Table 7 presents an overview of the subcategories within each of these two core categories and the corresponding number of meaning units within them, in order to give an overview of the findings at this level. It also provides details of the number of participants whose data made up the given categories. Within the data no one category emerged which could bring all of the subcategories together. Rather, two core categories appeared to best bring together the strands of the findings. These two categories illustrate two different aspects of what was learnt from the participants with regards to the understanding and place of social justice in counselling psychology.

The first core category refers to the theoretical or conceptual level of participants’ thoughts about social justice in counselling psychology. Specifically, this core category can be defined as reflecting the way in which participants understood what social justice was and their connection to it. There were three levels to this understanding: their understanding of the concept of social justice; their understanding of the profession’s connection to social justice; and their understanding of their personal connection to social justice. The data within this category therefore revolved around a reflection on social justice in counselling psychology in theoretical and personal terms.

The second core category by contrast can be defined as counselling psychologists’ talk about social justice action. This encapsulates four categories associated with

social justice action: what counselling psychologists could do and how they can act in order to move beyond the theoretical and conceptual talk seen in the initial core category; participants' discussions of their own previous experience of social justice action and plans for future social justice action; reflections on the challenges involved and associated difficulties with engaging in social justice action; and thoughts regarding the perception of a potential lack of social justice action within the UK counselling psychology profession. This second core category therefore moves away from social justice values and ideas to social justice in practice. Seven axial codes or subcategories were generated across the two core categories, as can be seen in Table 7. In the next sections of the findings I move on to describe these axial codes and the open codes within them in more depth.



**Table 7 - Qualitative findings**

<b>Core category 1</b>				<b>Core category 2</b>		
Counselling psychologists' understandings of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it Meaning units (MUs) = 222				Counselling psychologists' reflections on social justice action Meaning units (MUs) = 185		
<b>Subcategory (axial code)</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>		<b>Subcategory (axial code)</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Understanding of social justice	139	6		How counselling psychologists can act	58	6
Fit between social justice and counselling psychology	46	6		Participant social justice action	72	6
Personal connection to social justice	37	6		Issues with translating values into action	35	6
				Perception of a lack of action in the profession	20	5

#### **4.3.2. Subcategories within core category one:**

##### **Counselling psychologists' understandings of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it**

Within this section of the findings I move on to consider in more detail the categories contained within core category one. There were three subcategories: Understanding of social justice; Fit between social justice and counselling psychology; and Personal connection to social justice. I will consider these in turn.

##### ***Understanding of social justice***

The first subcategory within this refers to participants' descriptions of their understanding of social justice. Participants reflected on what the term social justice meant to them, and this subcategory had 15 categories (open codes) within it; an overview of this can be found in Table 8.

**Table 8 - Subcategory 1a: Understanding of social justice**

<b>Subcategory 1a.</b>  Understanding of social justice  Meaning units (MUs) = 139		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Comments on the process of defining social justice	9	5
Autonomy and agency as part of social justice	7	3
Bringing people into the community	2	1
Empowerment of disadvantaged or oppressed individuals or groups	16	6
Social justice about helping others to have a voice	5	1
Equality of resources and opportunities across groups in society	15	5
Recognition and awareness of individuals' needs	8	4
Meeting peoples' needs	7	4
Political nature of social justice	8	3
Power differences as unjust, importance of sharing power	9	3
Seeing people as human beings	18	3
Not about making the world perfect	2	2
Social justice considered in relation to social injustice	10	4
Link between social justice and religion	17	1
Connection between religion and politics	6	1

Social justice was found to be a challenging term to define, and participants commented on not having a formal definition as such, or struggling to put thoughts into words. One participant described it as a difficult term to “put your finger on, pin it down” (P10). The five different participants whose responses formed this category had slightly different perspectives on what specifically was challenging about defining social justice. One participant reflected that it wasn’t a term they would think to use:

it's not a term that I would use...erm I think probably you know I was explaining about my research before and there's something massive, a massive amount of systemic stuff that, issues that are coming up and issues that I want to address. And I, I guess that's the term I see...in terms of systemic stuff. (P20)

This participant noted that their contact with the term 'social justice' was limited to my using it in the context of this research, and that they would more commonly use other terms such as 'systemic' as mentioned above. Other participants described developing a social justice language as their knowledge grew, and feeling quite new to the area so being unsure of having the relevant terminology. Another of the participants reflected on the different levels of understanding of the concept social justice:

I think because it's something that's...social justice sounds a bit general, it's difficult to be sure that you describe exactly what it means and as well because[...] how I see social justice it has different meanings [...] Social justice as a movement, where, as a movement you have to have the knowledge to describe what this movement is, and I'm not sure but I assume that also should be social justice as a theory so again you know, you don't know exactly, it's more like what I believe it is. (P13)

This participant therefore judged there to be three layers of defining social justice: social justice as a movement, social justice as a theory, and social justice as a personal construct. The final layer, which was how they understood social justice in a personal sense, was reported to be easier for them to define than social justice either as a movement or a theory.

The other open codes within this subcategory, then, reflect participants' attempts to verbalize their understanding of social justice despite these issues. Participants suggested that individual autonomy and agency were important parts of social justice. Within this, one of the participants gave a concrete example of the way in which they saw this coming to life:

Different people would come to me and one of the dilemmas they'd ask is should we give money to homeless people if they are just gonna spend it on alcohol and drugs? And my personal response would be well that's a human being so whatever they wanna spend the money on then they have every right, it's not my place to tell them (P15)

The data indicated that respecting an individual's right to make decisions about his or her life, and be his or her own person was suggested to form part of what social justice is. All of the participants suggested that social justice involves empowering disadvantaged or oppressed groups in society. Participants reflected on the importance of empowering individuals to change things for themselves rather than giving or taking action from a privileged position:

I think it's for us to fight alongside people and help them but I don't think it's for us to be in that kind of liberal state where we ermm oh...you know...philanthropic and that kind of attitude. I think it's about, it's not about us having privileged position and then giving to others (P20)

One participant summed up the importance of involving those who are impacted by an injustice in the attempt to change that injustice:

yeah, one of the, one of the groups that I used to work with quite a well a lot, their, their phrase was 'nothing about us without us' and I fully subscribe to that (P3)

Additionally, participants commented that supporting people to cope with the difficult situations they are in is important, but that social justice involves empowering people to actively try and change the unjust situation rather than just adapt to it or come to terms with it. Connected to this was the theme of helping individuals have a voice. This was again described with regards to oppressed or disenfranchised individuals in society, and participants felt that all members of society have a right to a voice, and that part of social justice is about empowering those individuals to have their voices heard by others:

It's about giving those people who are angry because they're poor because they're in dysfunctional families, one person families, not even with their own relatives necessarily, all those...you know, and it's about helping them have a voice (P20).

Within the interviews, participants also suggested that social justice is about equality in society, and specifically about having equal access to opportunities across different groups. Several groups of society were discussed within this: equality for women; lower socioeconomic classes; children; and people with disabilities. For example, participants reflected on the injustice of the dominant group in society having a greater access to opportunities:

And in my mind the dominant group that have the most opportunities are men, white, western, middle class, Christians. I'm talking about Western world. So now, in England for instance I think that people have more possible opportunities in their lives from this group (P13).

Issues of power were also seen as connected to social justice. Specifically, when describing what social justice meant to them, participants reflected on power imbalances across society as being unjust. This therefore connects to the previous category in that it again emphasises the importance of equality as part of social justice, but here it refers specifically to an equal distribution of power. One participant suggested that you can measure the extent to which society is just by looking at the way society treats the powerless:

Somewhere I read this a long time ago...I don't know who said it, it probably sounds like Foucault or someone...before I ever knew who it was or heard about counselling and psychology, ermm, the quality of social justice in a civilisation is measured by how it treats its prisoners....a really minority group, who are powerless...pretty powerless, maybe no-one's absolutely powerless. Ermm and that's stayed with me what, right until now, across decades. So social justice is how people accommodate difference, others, even where there's disagreement. (P10)

The interview data suggested that social justice was seen to incorporate a

commitment to giving away or sharing power, in order to minimize the power imbalances which were judged to be unjust.

The next two categories: recognition and awareness of individuals' needs; and meeting needs can be considered together. Firstly, the interview data emphasized the importance of recognizing individuals' needs and recognizing that those needs might be different to, for example, the dominant group discussed above. The second of these categories then elaborated on this category by stating that social justice is explicitly about meeting those needs. Here, two of the participants reflected specifically on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, noting that all levels of needs are important factors:

Yeah, yeah...just I mean all those kind of ermm you know Maslow's hierarchy of needs I guess. You know safety and security and all that kind of thing....freedom from war...you know all those (P20)

Half of the participants made reference to the political nature of social justice. They suggested that social justice was a political endeavour and that social justice action is a political act:

I think I would see ermm well I think I see it [social justice] in terms of us being politicised. (P20)

One of the participants noted that social justice is a responsibility of the state, but that often the government is not aware of the needs of different groups in society. Furthermore, participants described how politics can be disillusioning to be involved in, but that because it is the venue for social change and it is where social justice can occur, people need to remain engaged and active despite the difficulties involved.

The next subcategory was referred to as 'seeing people as human beings'. Whilst having the largest number of meaning units within it, this category brings together data from only half of the participants. 'Seeing people as human beings' brings together these participants' reflections on the importance of seeing individuals for who they are in a holistic sense, rather than solely as part of the social group they belong to. For example one participant noted that people are often dehumanized by

society, and that social justice is about humanizing others:

So like, one of the groups that interests me erm because they're so so disenfranchised and scape goated are paedophiles, or people with paedophilic tendencies. And sex offenders have done horrendous things, that disgust me on a kind of very deep almost ontological level, but there's still a human being there. Erm, and rather than seek to help people we just seek to say right they're, they're the ones that we can completely ignore. And everyone's gonna have a different person who that is. It might be prisoners, it might be people from other cultures, it might be women it might be men, it might be gays, you know whatever we all have a group that we...we erm can't, or find it difficult to associate or want to put all our crap on and say, project it there so that we don't have to deal with it. (P15)

One of the categories focused on the connection between social justice and religion. The meaning units within this category came solely from one of the participants, who reflected on how their understanding of social justice comes from their faith, and specifically how their social justice values and action are inextricably tied up with their faith. They described how from a Christian point of view it is important to work with the poor or oppressed, as a way of connecting with God:

So erm they are, they are the people that, that erm, that need to...that we can...not need to, but can connect with, and I think we can connect with God through those people. So, rather than seeing God within kind of religious buildings or stuff like that, my faith is committed to seeing, and this might sound a bit weird so I might have to unpack it, but seeing God in the poor. (P15)

Finally, social justice was regularly defined by participants in relation to what is socially unjust:

So maybe the opposite, another way of defining it is to look at what the, maybe not the opposite but where there's a lack of justice and concern. (P15)

Well as I say I think social justice is about trying to address injustice. (P20)



In their attempts to define social justice, participants regularly referred to attempting to reverse injustices or challenge injustice in society, as can be seen in the quotes above. Participants described the need to face injustice as part of working towards social justice, and the importance of levelling out inequalities or unfair systems in society.

### ***Fit between social justice and counselling psychology***

The next subcategory within participants' understandings of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it moves beyond social justice considered by itself and brings together categories which focus on the fit between social justice and the profession of counselling psychology. Within this there were nine subcategories which again I will summarize here. See Table 9 for an overview of the categories and the associated number of meaning units and participants.

**Table 9 – Subcategory 1b: Fit between social justice and counselling psychology**

<b>Subcategory 1b.</b>		
Fit between social justice and counselling psychology		
Meaning units (MUs) = 46		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Philosophy and nature of counselling psychology and social justice	6	3
Clients are in society so can't ignore social issues	4	2
Fit between social justice and counselling theory	3	2
IAPT: mixed views on whether consistent with social justice and counselling psychology	4	3
Psychology is political	5	1
Social justice as distinguishing feature of counselling psychology	4	2
Social justice is completely relevant to counselling psychology	8	5
Specific social justice issues in mental health field	6	5
Could argue that social justice is not part of the profession	6	4

Half of the participants reflected on the way in which they see the philosophy of counselling psychology as connecting well to the ideas of social justice. For example one participant described how they felt that the profession's emphasis on wellbeing rather than pathology fits with the values of social justice:

Even the fact that erm counselling psychology focus on wellbeing and not necessarily only the mental health that clinical psychology may focus more, not necessarily, you know what I mean. This on its own shows that we try to help everybody, whoever is in need regardless where this need is coming from we want to help them, so this also is social justice. (P13)

Along similar lines, interview data suggested that participants judged social justice to be wholly relevant to the profession of counselling psychology. A number of participants reported being unable to see any ways in which social justice wasn't a relevant consideration for the profession, and they reflected instead on the vital nature of social justice to counselling psychology, as illustrated by the following quote:

I mean I think it's integral really, I mean I think a lot of the distress and mental health problems and the increase in mental health problems are related to social justice. Erm I guess that's what I was trying to say earlier about the power relations is that, is as long as that's maintained then yeah these difficulties will keep emerging, and so I yeah, I kind of think it's, it should be at the forefront of counselling psychology and there's an element of I suppose not just counselling psychology but psychology more broadly, if we don't address these issues we're almost just kind of colluding with the status quo and not, we're just trying to treat what is there not trying to prevent what may happen and considering you know kind of our role in a sense, I remember when one of our tutors at the start of the course he said erm yeah we're almost try and do ourselves out of a job because we try and help people to get better so that they leave and in a sense that, that kind of implies again on a more social level I suppose that why, why try and do the treating of something which is there if we could try and be preventing something. So, yeah I mean I see it as as really important. (P12).

This quote illustrates the reasons that the members of the counselling psychology profession were giving for why they saw social justice as relevant to counselling psychology; participants noted that society causes distress and so working on an individual treatment level with clients isn't enough. The data suggested that participants saw their clients as inseparable in a way from the society which they were part of, and believed that to ignore social issues was naïve on the part of any counselling psychologist. Furthermore, participants suggested that social justice might be of particular relevance to counselling psychology because of the work counselling psychologists do within the field of mental health, and the specific issues within this field:

I think we should all be aware and I think why it's particularly important...so we should all be aware and try and to address injustices that you know come our way, ermm...but I think mental health professionals have a particularly important role because mental health labelling and the whole mental health process is particularly disempowering for a massive portion of society. (P20)

The data also indicated that the counselling psychologists judged social justice to be relevant to counselling psychology because of the connection through politics. Specifically, participants suggested that psychology is political and that although some psychologists may be uncomfortable with the political nature of the profession, everything we do has a political implication. In addition to this, participants felt that social justice was potentially a feature of counselling psychology which might distinguish it from allied professions within the field of psychology:

Well I see it as a potential. I think is the best way to put it. As a profession, we need to find something that distinguishes us from the other psychology professions, and to me, social justice has the potential to do that. Our emphasis on social justice has the potential to do that. (P3)

One participant felt that social justice isn't a particularly large part of the identity of counselling psychology in the UK, but that it is a bigger part of it than for example it is within clinical psychology, which again indicated that participants potentially saw social justice as something of a distinguishing feature of the profession. Nevertheless, another category illustrated the way in which participants could also see that other people might feasibly be able to argue that social justice isn't part of counselling psychology. This wasn't an argument that these participants generally agreed with however, as illustrated by the following quote:

because even though we work erm mainly in one to one base or groups, we are not, our erm field of psychology doesn't work with communities, it's more like psychotherapeutic as you know. So we can easily say I don't care about the rest of the world, I care about my individual clients, the people that I see. But at the same time, how I see it, how can you help a person? (P13)

### *Personal connection to social justice*

Moving away from the connection between the profession and social justice, the final subcategory within this first core category was focused on participants' personal connection to social justice. This subcategory brings together eight open codes. See Table 10 for a full summary of these categories.

**Table 10 - Subcategory 1c: Personal connection to social justice**

<b>Subcategory 1c.</b>		
Personal connection to social justice		
Meaning units (MUs) = 37		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Connection between social justice and professional identity	2	2
Participants' emotional reaction to issues of social justice	8	6
Personal experience of injustice	6	2
Personal experience of privilege	2	1
Personal experience of having a social justice role model	6	2
Personal meaning taken from social justice work	2	2
Personal understanding of social justice	6	5
Religious beliefs connect self to social justice	5	1

Interview data suggested that participants had an emotional reaction to issues of social justice. For example participants reflected on the anger they initially experienced at learning about inequalities in the world and the underlying passion they held for social justice. Participants described their social justice values as an important part of their selves. This idea is captured in the following quote, where one participant reflected on how they felt connected to social justice:

It is part of my professional identity erm, it's not, you don't see it daily, but it's more like a thing, a general idea that I carry and I, a general philosophy that I carry with me and a general value let's say. (P13)

There was also a contrast between the participants, one of whom reflected on their personal experience of privilege, whilst two reflected on their personal experiences of injustice. Personal experience of injustice contributed to one participant's understanding of justice and what social justice meant in practice in the world:

mmm what does it mean to me? Ermmm it's a personal concept in a way, as well as a more general thing. Cos the experiences I've had in life which have felt just so...in a kind of childlike sense, so unfair, and how that's played out socially, economically, erm putting it into a bigger picture politically...where I've found myself in minority groups where, kind of, what I'll say the system in a loose sense, perhaps even you know the social kind of system, the constructs people make, the way these play out in life, have worked against me and I've had very difficult experiences. (P10)

This participant had drawn on their experiences of being in powerless positions, and being part of several marginalized groups in society, and therefore social justice was a particularly personal concept for them as opposed to something strictly academic or theoretical. In contrast to this experience of injustice, one participant reflected on how embarking on training in counselling psychology had promoted self-reflection and learning about their experience of privilege in the world:

I suppose the reason why I come in from that angle is I mean, particularly starting the training in counselling psychology and some of the experience, the clinical experience I've gained, the privileges which I've had in my education and my life and have helped me to get to where I am, erm, versus the people who I see in the consulting room...you know, there's such a stark difference. (P12)

They noted that beginning to work with different groups of society had opened their eyes to some extent, and how their connection to social justice was shaped by their experience of occupying a privileged status in society.

Further categories within this subcategory illustrated other ways in which participants had this personal connection to social justice. For example, one participant again reflected on their religion and how social justice is a personal thing to them because of the connection with their religion:

So, yeah I see it very much as a commitment to my faith. (P15)

The interview data also suggested that experience of knowing someone who took the role of a social justice role model in their life was important. One participant reflected on this happening in their academic life, and another in a personal setting:

Yeah, about thinking, erm, I think I've had really good role models like <name> who's now a professor of critical and community psychology, he's been a great role model for me. (P15)

And education has been my way out. When I started, I was in a psychiatric hospital and they said to me don't do it, you're setting yourself up for failure, and I thought no I've got to do something with my life. I'm resentful I never had an education. That at 12 it stopped. And I met somebody socially proactive. Every now and again I write to him. He was this African guy who was a nurse, who had several degrees and he said you know, on the nursing staff I'm the most highly qualified person, but I'm doing nights, and he said to me, education made me. In a sense it opened up my view of the world, gave me a richer life. That was socially proactive...someone who listened, who believed that change can happen. In a place where people talk about change but it was lip service. And all these years later here I am. You're recording me and I'm recounting this other experience. (P10)

The data indicated that participants found it difficult to separate out the personal and professional threads contained within their understandings of social justice:

I suppose I can't separate my role from my experiences in life. Because it's how I see the world, and I am who I am from the experiences I've had. (P10)

My understanding of the key elements [of social justice] comes from my experiences (P3)

The members of the counselling psychology profession interviewed thus experienced their understandings of social justice as fundamentally rooted in their personal experiences discussed in the categories above. They struggled to distinguish between their personal understandings and their professional understandings of the term.



#### **4.3.3. Subcategories within core category two:**

##### **Counselling psychologists' reflections on social justice action**

In this section of the qualitative findings I elaborate on the findings within the second of the two core categories. Within this, four subcategories were generated which were as follows: How counselling psychologists can act; Participant social justice action; Issues with translating values into practice; and Perception of a lack of action in the profession.

##### ***How counselling psychologists can act***

The members of the counselling psychology profession included in the study had many ideas on how counselling psychologists can translate their social justice values into practice. This subcategory brings together those thoughts and has within it ten categories (see Table 11).

**Table 11 - Subcategory 2a: How counselling psychologists can act**

<b>Subcategory 2a.</b>		
How counselling psychologists can act		
Meaning units (MUs) = 58		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Connections between other professions is important	5	2
Counselling psychologists' awareness of and use of their power	10	4
Counselling psychologists can act by talking with their clients about the impact society has on them	2	2
Counselling psychologists can have an influential role in the system	9	2
Counselling psychologists' role in broader interventions	3	2
Counselling psychologists should be advocates	2	1
Importance of congruence between values or talk and action	7	3
Importance of facing and talking about injustice	8	5
Importance of understanding the issue and how it really feels	6	3
Working against the status quo, if that is unjust	6	3

Although they had many suggestions on how counselling psychologists could act as single practitioners, a theme which suggested that connecting with other professions is important also arose in the data, rather than acting alone. For example, the data suggested that connecting with disciplines both outside of psychology where individuals might have additional skills and knowledge to engage in social justice work effectively, and with other branches of psychology such as social psychologists and community psychologists might be beneficial. The primary functions of connecting with other professions were to gain support and to exchange ideas on good practice:

I guess that's where sort of working across disciplines is really important because if you know when like the, if it feels a bit, at least from where I'm standing... a bit kind of not overwhelming you know it's a whole field which is erm unknown or less known, then it's important to work with other professions or other people who might have a better understanding of it to try and you know kind of bring that into our work as well. But I think yeah, I really do think it's crucial. (P12)

The interview data suggested that there is a need for counselling psychologists to work against the status quo within society, if that status quo is unjust. Participants highlighted that if counselling psychologists are not trying to work in creative ways to challenge unjust societal norms then they are becoming part of that system. Every choice which counselling psychologists make is then considered to be important in terms of whether it is contributing to working towards social justice or against it:

And our choices that we make, how that then impacts on then do we work for a social justice agenda in making things fairer for people, and making things change? Or is what we're doing by its very nature helping the status quo stay as it is? (P3)

Participants shared ideas of how counselling psychologists on their own can achieve change, and how they might therefore challenge the status quo. One theme along these lines was counselling psychologists' awareness of and use of their power. Interview data indicated counselling psychologists in their professional roles occupy positions of power, and as social justice concerns the removal of power inequalities in society, counselling psychologists should therefore give their power away and be careful not to be corrupted by it:

What happens is I think when people, this is what Freire says, often the oppressed become the oppressors. So we might think oh like oh the whole psychiatric institution is against us and the clinical psychology institution so then we get power and it's like hold onto the power don't let anything disrupt that. (P15)

Nevertheless there was another strand within this theme which suggested that

counselling psychologists might, instead of purely giving their power away, use the degree of power they have to engage in social justice work. The data suggested that participants thought that counselling psychologists could therefore occupy a middle position in between ‘the powerful’ and ‘the powerless’ and attempt to change things for the better for the powerless. An element of this can be seen in the following quote:

If we want to challenge the power systems we can’t just sit in a little qualitative erm bubble, we need to be able to do quantitative research, we need to be able to speak to the powers, erm, in a language that they can understand. And there is a place for standing back and saying I don’t want to be sullied by this but at the same time we need to be smart if we want to help people, we can’t just be thinking about ourselves. (P15)

This category ties into the notion of having an influential role in the system. This reflects the idea that counselling psychologists could explicitly use that power as described in the previous category by having quite a political and active role in the wider system:

And I think again it’s not a role you know that I’m taking up but I think that ermm we do have a place ermm to, and actually this is what <name> was saying we do have a place, psychologists, to be somebody who manages some of this and co-ordinates a lot of the stuff and has that bigger systemic picture that a lot of the other professions don’t necessarily have. They could have, you know it could just be about giving them the training and then any of them could take it on. (P20).

Further suggestions included occupying positions on boards in institutions such as the National Health Service (NHS); acting as consultants; and raising awareness in the wider society.

The interview participants also suggested that counselling psychologists might act on their social justice values by engaging in advocacy work on behalf of clients:

So this is why I think that we work with the person but also we work for the people and we need to have this in mind. And social justice should be...we should be advocates of social justice if we actually want to provide the best for our clients. (P13)

Along a similar vein of broadening the role of the counselling psychologist, the suggestion was also made that practitioners might wish to engage in broader interventions, beyond the level of the individual clients, for example by working towards community level change and group interventions:

But it also means that I need to think a bit broader than one to one interventions. So like, we know that for most mental and physical illness poverty is the major issue, erm, so we can help individuals which I think is right and I'm committed to that, but if we know that poverty is the major issue and we're just like helping individuals then there's a problem with that, it's counter-intuitive it doesn't make sense. So I think we need to find ways of tackling broad issues as well as one to one issues. (P15)

'Importance of facing and talking about injustice' highlighted the way in which counselling psychologists felt that simply talking about social justice and injustice with people is a form of social action counselling psychologists can engage in. Participants reflected on the way in which keeping inequality for example as something 'out there' away from mainstream society perpetuates problems and keeps things hidden, and therefore described the way in which counselling psychologists can act by bringing issues of injustice to the attention of people in society. One participant described the importance of not looking away from injustice; the following in vivo code illustrates this idea:

To not close our eyes (P13)

Participants emphasized the importance of consistency between values and action. Interview data suggested that participants found it hypocritical when they came across individuals who talked as if they strove towards social justice but whose actions were in contradiction with this. Participants described the need for counselling psychologists to act if they believe in social justice:

I guess you've gotta be real about it you know. And if you really believe in it then you've got to be actively out there on the streets in some way. I'm not saying everybody has to be but there's something about it being real. (P20)

Therefore in addition to bringing together data suggesting various ways in which counselling psychologists can act, this subcategory demonstrates the way in which the members of the counselling psychology profession judged that action was important in order to be consistent with any social justice values which individuals espouse. In addition to this, the participants suggested that it was important to really understand the experience of disenfranchised or oppressed groups in society rather than purely paying the issues lip service:

It's important to understand, say these kids, or for the staff in prisons, to understand what goes on. And not just pay lip service to it, oh yeah they've had a crap childhood but to really try and understand what it must be like for a kid to ermm you know not be with a parent who's now setting up a new family with a new good little child as opposed to this one, and they're in...they're impoverished and they're living with their gran and they don't have much money and the gran can't be as active as they need them to be or something like that. You know there's a whole load of sort of poverty issues and drug issues and mental health issues. (P20)

This was also expressed by emphasizing the need to understand that the poor or disenfranchised groups of society aren't different from you.

### ***Participant social justice action***

Building on the participants' thoughts on how counselling psychologists can act on their social justice values, the next subcategory within core category two focuses on what the counselling psychologists included in the interviews reported having done themselves in terms of social justice work. This subcategory therefore brings together themes which concern the social justice action of the participants. There were 11 open codes, which can be seen listed in Table 12.

**Table 12 - Subcategory 2b: Participant social justice action**

<b>Subcategory 2b.</b>		
Participant social justice action		
Meaning units (MUs) = 72		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Participant involvement with specific groups, organisations or campaigns outside of counselling psychology	8	3
Participant social justice action through choices on where to work	3	3
Respecting client agency, choice and autonomy	9	4
Considering social and cultural factors in formulation	4	3
Educating and training others	7	3
Research and writing on social justice issues	3	2
Stepping outside of the traditional therapeutic frame	3	3
Talking about and challenging injustice in and outside of counselling psychology	13	6
Talking with the client about the impact society has on them	4	2
Volunteer role (not as a psychologist)	4	1
Way of life or attitude	5	2

The interview data indicated that members of the counselling psychology profession viewed their commitment to social justice manifesting itself in practice as a way of life or a general attitude. They described how social justice can be considered as a lifestyle choice or something which runs across the different areas in their lives. One participant described it as a personal value which they carried daily, whilst another reflected on their attitude as being a fundamental part of their social justice practice:

I think my attitude towards people, and not just in a kind of political or ideological sense, but how I talk about my clients, how I talk to my clients,

how I talk to other people, the kind of person I am is where it starts for me. So am I open...am I the kind of person who makes you a cup of tea or wants you to make me a cup of tea? So I know that probably sounds really stupid, well it's not stupid it's just to me that's an attitude, erm, and it's a very simple way of thinking. (P15).

Social justice was thus seen as a lifestyle choice which manifests itself in numerous ways across the counselling psychologists' experience, rather than in a discrete block of time which they devote to engaging in specific social justice work. Nevertheless, as well as this broader sense of social justice work, participants did also reflect on concrete examples of the type of social justice work they have been or are involved in. For example interview data suggested that a commitment to social justice was perceived to impact on direct client work in a number of ways, and the members of the counselling psychology profession considered how to interact with clients in terms of their social justice values. Firstly, participants described how an emphasis on client agency and autonomy in their therapeutic work is judged to be a way of engaging in social justice action. They reflected in particular on how client choice regarding his or her therapeutic experience is a part of practising in a socially just way:

I think there's a lot of ermm, I think there's a lot of people out there who try very hard to work in different ways than the traditional way of working. Ermm I very rarely have a traditional hour long session one to one with somebody in a room. Because the people I work with often can't tolerate that. Ermm either there's cognitive difficulties or there are ermm just issues with being in a, in a confined space so you know, so I will go out and do a session in the gardens, or I'll go out and do a session while I'm walking to Sainsbury's with somebody or you know because that way we're still talking but we're talking in an environment that that person has chosen to talk in. They tell me what they want the session to look like, and ermm some of them do chose one to one, that's then their choice I don't impose that on them. (P3)

Furthermore, collaboration with the client on the tasks of therapy was emphasized by participants as being an important part of this form of social justice action, as well as



remembering that the client is an active participant in therapeutic work, and seeing the client as a whole within his or her context, rather than as an individual to fit into a therapeutic approach:

I think that I see each person with their individual values and needs can also be social justice, you don't try to fit the person in your approach or in your erm culture, you try to see their culture and their words and how they experience it.  
(P13)

Another way in which members of the counselling psychology profession act on their social justice values within direct client work is through stepping outside of the traditional therapeutic frame, in the sense of directing clients to where they can gain further help or assistance, or engaging in advocacy work. In addition to this, the data indicated that participants acted on their social justice values by considering cultural and social factors in formulation and by taking account of the impact society may have had on the individual. This appeared in the data with respect to the therapist formulating their ideas about their work with the client, as well as directly talking with the client about the impact society may have had on him or her:

So, I suppose you know helping the client think beyond themselves, someone like erm what's his name Bronfenbrenner you know ecological systems...and the person being the interaction of the person and the environment, so having those concepts and bringing those into the therapeutic relationship if appropriate (P15)

As well as within direct client work, participants described engaging in social justice work in different areas of their role as a counselling psychologist, including engaging in research with a social justice perspective. For example a number of the participants reported conducting research which had a social justice angle. The data also indicated that the social justice values of the members of the counselling psychology were manifest also in work educating and training others. For example, one participant described how they train staff on issues of disability awareness:

I think the other thing though for me is I also do a little bit of training based on my previous career. So I will do a little bit of training on deaf awareness

because the range of people that we get coming through here has all the same difficulties on top of the mental health difficulties that everybody else has, so allowing them to access the service in exactly the same way that everybody else accesses it is also an issue. So I deal with it in that way as well so I bring previous experience in. (P3)

Some of the categories within the social justice action of participants reflected social justice work the members of the counselling psychology profession did which spanned across their personal and professional lives. For example participants engaged in challenging injustice and talking about issues of social justice both in and outside of their role as counselling psychologists. The data indicated that challenging discrimination in conversations is a way in which the counselling psychologists could translate their social justice values into practice. One participant described how in developing a commitment to social justice they have noticed themselves becoming more aware of social issues and talking about them more with friends. Another described the need to ask difficult questions and challenge people on specific issues. Furthermore, the participants described engaging in activities designed to raise public awareness of social issues through media such as social networking:

I think in general you know I read and think, and even for instance this sounds silly but nowadays because of the social networks you promote ideas through that. You read an article you find interesting you upload it there and other people can read it and so this is also part of you carry social justice you want to share it with other people then (P13)

Participants also reported being involved in social justice action outside of their role as a counselling psychologist, for example by engaging with specific community groups; being part of trade unions; having financial commitments; involvement in environmental causes; taking part in protests; and membership and action with political groups.

### *Issues with translating values into practice*

The next subcategory within counselling psychologists' reflections on social justice action focuses on the reported issues with translating social justice values into practice. Whereas the previous categories described how counselling psychologists might and do act, this category deepens our understanding of social justice action for counselling psychologists by bringing together the participants' descriptions of potential difficulties involved in social justice action. Within this, seven open codes were generated which can be seen in Table 13.

**Table 13 - Subcategory 2c: Issues with translating values into practice**

<b>Subcategory 2c.</b>		
Issues with translating values into practice		
Meaning units (MUs) = 35		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Context of job restricts opportunities for social justice action	6	3
Don't know how to act on social justice values	3	1
Going against mainstream or pervasive ideology – feeling of being different	5	3
Issues with specific theoretical models and social justice action	8	5
It's challenging to be consistent and to face social justice issues	3	3
Self-care boundaries	3	2
Time issues of being involved in social justice action	7	3

Social justice action was described as being a challenge, and participants reported that it is difficult to be consistent with social justice values all of the time. For example, one participant reported that coming from a privileged background meant that sometimes social issues can be difficult to talk about with peers. The category of going against mainstream or pervasive ideology extends this and brings together

thoughts that the counselling psychologists had about feeling different from others or feeling as if they were going against cultural norms and therefore feeling like outsiders:

I think I mean in the experience I've had so far it feels like sometimes you get to brick walls. Or lets say the discourse around meritocracy or individualism is just so strong that it makes you kind of question ohh actually you know am, is what I'm thinking a bit barmy? or you know, it's...I think that's where being around discussions on social justice or where lets say a more, a discourse around communion or collectivist, whatever it might be, then helps to facilitate something because you hear it so often in conversation, individualism or whatever is just so ingrained, like what was it the other day...I think it was on they've reduced the allowance for benefits, they were saying you know if you haven't found a job within a year then they will take away any benefits. You know that kind of, it makes sense to think that and it's like well if you're not working after a while then there's kind of ideas that somebody's just sitting on their bum and not doing anything, and that's quite a powerful way of thinking. The reality is that it is just so much more complicated and when you come up against that, that's what I think is quite difficult. To try and change our way of thinking about something (P12)

This participant therefore felt that sometimes it is difficult to maintain a position which is being consistently opposed in mainstream discourse. Similarly, another participant questioned the ability to engage in social justice action through academia when the mainstream discourse might have trouble with some of the ideas put forward:

For me, when I look towards the future there's two things that go together. I love research and I love academia and I would love to be able to promote that part of the training through the research or through the academic route. I can't see that happening because I think most places who do the training would think oh no that's too dangerous, (laughs) that wouldn't stop me necessarily having a go. (P3)

One participant also reported being unsure about how they could act on their social justice values:

To be honest I don't really....I don't really know how, what, what it is that I can do, how I can get involved (P12)

This open code appears to stand in contrast to the previous two subcategories within the second core category, which brought together many thoughts on what social justice action counselling psychologists might be involved in and are involved in, because it suggested that a lack of ideas or knowing where to begin might hold counselling psychologists back from being involved in social justice work.

Other findings suggested that the context of a counselling psychologist's job may restrict the level of social justice work they are able to do as part of their professional role. The data indicated that because counselling psychologists might be working in medically dominated contexts, it becomes more important to be taken seriously in the workplace, with social justice work becoming less of a priority:

I understand why, because because with the context that I work in, which is medically dominated, we have to be taken seriously, ermm and there's a certain discourse that you have to use to be taken seriously. (P3)

A number of the counselling psychologists described how they found issues with specific theoretical models in terms of how much they allowed social justice action to be part of therapeutic work. Three theoretical models were discussed within this: cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT), psychodynamic therapy (PT), and person-centred therapy (PCT). The data indicated that participants found CBT to be incompatible in some ways with social justice work:

When I came into doing counselling psychology and doing my training I was always was extremely uncomfortable with the whole idea when we started doing formulation in CBT. I began to be incredibly uncomfortable with the idea that somewhere along the line it seemed as though it was a potential, the potential was there to say to someone well actually if you, if you conceptualise this as this is the way, this is the issue, these are the triggers for this depression

or whatever it was, ermm and we can help you change the way that you think about that in order to change the way you feel about it seemed fundamentally wrong to me because to me, the depression was a functional, normal persons reaction to an abnormal situation so why was the person needing to change when actually it was the situation that needed to? You know? Ermm, and it seemed just really uncomfortable, that while OK great that we can help the person cope with that, but something is seriously missing if at the same time we're not doing something to change the situation that caused it in the first place. (P3)

CBT therefore, in taking the approach of changing the client's thought patterns, appeared to participants to contradict social justice values and inhibit social justice work by ignoring the wider social problems which may be causing someone distress. Similarly, the data indicated that PT was also judged to be limiting in terms of the room within the model for social justice work:

And I guess there's a tension in that and to be aware of it erm because I am and I think psychodynamic is such a powerful model in a sense that I mean it's helped me a hell of a lot erm and seen my clients over the course of a year you know has been really, I think it speaks volumes for the model, but I think sometimes it is at the cost of the social dynamics lets say, which might be at play in somebody's life. And you can't always incorporate that (P12)

Additionally, PCT was also considered to miss a social justice perspective. Specifically, the counselling psychologists suggested that facilitating someone to become more accepting of his or her self, was not enough, as the client might therefore be going out of the therapy room into a social environment which does not accept the individual unconditionally:

yeah because person centred is about finding your own self, going, not going against the norms but findings which norms make you who you are and check if this are your, you know who you are. And accept, find your own self regardless of the others. OK, this is not exactly a definition of person centred but you know you, try to move away from the others and from the norms and

conditionals. But actually even though it's great to as a person to live unconditionally and erm, we live in a society and it is full of conditions and we have to be aware of that. And yeah, this is what I was saying about the person-centred. And erm so I think that trying to work with our clients, trying to help them, maybe we can in this process also erm make these conditions better for them instead of saying that these conditions should not exist for you we can say lets improve them so you can feel better in society and this community (P13)

The findings within this subcategory also indicated that time issues might be a problem for counselling psychologists who wish to engage in social justice action. Participants reflected on how their limited time means that often they struggle to act on their social justice values. Some of the trainees described how they had full schedules of training already and had no available free time to learn more about social issues or engage in social justice action:

You know I because I'm only in at the end of second year I don't you know I haven't quite got the feel of how counselling psychology is kind of represented throughout the country but erm it felt like and as well the discussions on the course, sometimes it feels like maybe this goes back to the language, problem I had in defining social justice, erm, that it's it's almost like erm erm it's another you're entering into another discipline, the social psychology, which with the I suppose especially for counselling psychologists who are training already with the enormity of of what we are taking on erm I think sometimes that might feel like quite a lot (P12)

The above quote illustrates the view that social justice does not form part of the training package as it is, so adding it on top of that places one too many demands on the time of the trainee counselling psychologists. Social justice work and learning were viewed to be things to do on top of either the training or practice of a counselling psychologist, and therefore time restrictions were reported to be an issue. Similar to this, participants reflected on the need to look after themselves, and how this may sometimes mean that they engage less with social action. For example, participants described how they didn't feel that individuals should be expected to

sacrifice themselves for the cause, and that you need to know your own limits in terms of how much time you can offer:

yes because this is the thing also we again as I said earlier we are not Mother Teresa I cannot, I want to do that but as well there are some other personal needs that I need to meet and it's true that I put my needs first from social justice. So yeah I don't have the time now because of my personal responsibilities and priorities. (P13)

### ***Perception of a lack of action in the profession***

Within this final axial code, a perception of a lack of action in the profession, categories are brought together which reflect the notion that the counselling psychologists interviewed perceive there to be a lack of social justice action happening within counselling psychology in the UK. Within this there were three open codes, which can be seen in Table 14.

**Table 14 - Subcategory 2d: Perception of a lack of action in the profession**

<b>Subcategory 2d.</b>		
Perception of a lack of action in the profession		
Meaning units (MUs) = 20		
<b>Open code</b>	<b>MUs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Don't see evidence of interest in social justice	5	4
Social justice values appear to be present, but not always acted on in the profession	10	4
Social justice not mentioned on the training course	5	3

The three categories within this axial code represent aspects of the perceived lack of social justice action within counselling psychology in the UK. For clarity I will talk through these in turn. Firstly, the data indicated that some participants did not consider there to be evidence of an interest in social justice within the wider counselling psychology profession in the UK:



Yeah, well when was there a, you know, where's the counselling psychology review on social justice? If you look at the handbook of counselling psychology, there's, from memory I could be wrong about this, there's one chapter on community psychology which looks at broader issues but where's the rest? Erm, and when I talk to people on the course, there has to be a commitment to having a professional identity and it's not wrong to have money, but the broader implications, where are they? And I'm not saying in that, that people don't care about other people at all but when we talk about these things where is it talked about? Where is it written about? So that would lead me to think unless everyone's covert guerrilla like social justice practitioners then I, I don't know where it is. (P15)

Participants also noted here that they don't see many publications about social justice issues within the UK counselling psychology literature, and they feel frustrated that the channels for discussion about social justice are not perceived to be open for example in professional bodies. In addition to this, there was a theme within the data which suggested that although social justice values appear to be present within the counselling psychology profession in the UK, participants considered that these did not appear to translate into action:

And I have to say I ermmm, carry some, some feelings, perhaps not all...I don't want to say good/ bad, ermm well almost like I read...if I frame it this way, so for part of my own ermm work and research and learning I've read about how the division was set up, err and the kind of founders of counselling psychology....the ethos of the field. And sometimes I feel like, have they...have we dropped the ball along the way? (P10)

So I read things about you know oh there's counselling psychologists we place a lot of emphasis on context and I think yeah, I'm sure we do, but where's the evidence for that? I don't see a lot of evidence erm and that might be unfair, it probably is unfair but you know it's, I still think it's a question that needs asking. Where is the evidence? (P3)

Members of the counselling psychology profession therefore perceived that although

there may be some espoused social justice values within the profession, this fails to translate into a culture of social justice action. Consistent with this, the final category within this theme described how the members of the counselling psychology profession interviewed, despite having training on issues of power in the therapy room, did not in general have experience of any mention of social justice on their training courses. The following three quotes illustrate this final theme in the data:

And as well I think it depends what, I mean I've got one tutor in mind from my course, who definitely speaks much more in terms of social justice so it also depends what classes we have and what discussions we have and things like that. But having said that on the whole, I would say that the lectures or the speakers or the people who've come from outside who are counselling psychologists tend to bring in, maybe not social justice as such, but you know elements of it, and thinking about the wider influences. I think it's...it's more wider picture rather than social justice, personally yeah. I mean, I, they have spoken about power relations and oppression but I suppose oppression less so and I don't think actually social justice has necessarily been mentioned once or not that I've heard it. (P12)

I know from, from our training we did a fair amount of work on power and power in the therapy room, but we didn't necessarily do a lot of work on power within the wider social work, environment. (P3)

yeah because you know we are training to become something, so if we are not trained about this element it seems somehow that it shouldn't be part of our identity. (P13)

The findings in this final subcategory therefore indicated that the counselling psychology profession in the UK is perceived to have limited demonstrable evidence of an interest in social justice, for example in lacking an emphasis on social justice in the training of counselling psychologists. Participants either concluded that this meant that the profession does not have an interest in social justice, or that it does have an interest but does not translate this interest into social justice action.

#### **4.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter has reported the findings of the current research project. Initially the findings from the preliminary quantitative phase of the research were presented. The current sample of members of the counselling psychology profession's scores on the SIQ were presented as well as presenting a comparison of the scores on the social justice interest and social justice commitment subscales to those gathered in the two other published papers which have used this measure. This demonstrated that the current study found lower levels of social justice interest and commitment than in a previous sample of US based counselling psychology trainees, and more similar levels to those of a sample of undergraduate students based in the US, who were studying a range of subjects both inside and outside of counselling and psychology. The qualitative findings were then presented. Two core categories in the data were presented: (1) 'Counselling psychologists' understanding of social justice in counselling psychology and their connection to it' and (2) 'Counselling psychologists' reflections on social justice action'. All of the seven subcategories contained within these two core categories were then elaborated and an overview of the open codes within these was discussed, using quotes from the participants to ground the categories in the data.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This section of the thesis considers the findings of the research project in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and considers the outcomes of the entire study. The purpose of the research was to explore the social justice interest and commitment of counselling psychologists in the UK. Within this discussion I aim to reflect on the core findings from the study. As this is the second point of data integration within this partially mixed methods study, the findings from the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research are considered together. The discussion is divided into three main sections initially. Firstly I consider counselling psychologists' understandings of and connection to social justice. Following this I discuss the findings relating to the social justice interest of counselling psychologists and the relevance of social justice to counselling psychology. Finally, I consider the social justice commitment and action of counselling psychologists in the UK and reflect on whether or not the findings of the study suggest that there is a rhetoric-action gap in this area. As the level of integration or mixing of the quantitative and qualitative findings varies across these three areas, within each section I have stated whether qualitative, quantitative or both types of findings are drawn upon to inform my conclusions. Following these three main sections of the discussion I reflect on the implications of the findings of the study for the wider counselling psychology profession. I then critically examine the methodology of the present study. Following this, I move on to discuss potential avenues for future research, before considering recommendations for theory, training and practice.

### **5.2. How counselling psychologists understand social justice**

In order to reflect on how counselling psychologists understand social justice I have drawn solely on the qualitative findings, as the findings reported from the quantitative phase cannot inform us about this element of the topic of enquiry, as the questionnaire measure did not ask about participants understandings of social justice.

As discussed in the literature review, there was a paucity of prior research conducted which looked at how counselling psychologists understand the term social justice. No prior research had been conducted which investigated how counselling psychologists in the UK define social justice. The qualitative phase of this study interviewed members of the counselling psychology profession, whose scores on the Social Issues Questionnaire indicated that they rated themselves as having at least a moderate interest in and commitment to social justice, in order to explore their understanding of social justice. The members of the counselling psychology profession interviewed defined social justice in a way which was largely consistent with the theoretical literature in the area. Findings indicated that counselling psychologists consider power and autonomy to be elements of the concept of social justice (see Crethar et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2004; Vera & Speight, 2004). Social justice was also understood in the present research to be about meeting individuals' basic needs, which echoes the idea of Taylor (2003) that justice is a basic human need, and is consistent with the research conducted by Todd and Rufa (2012). Additionally, two of the six participants in the current sample made direct reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in their discussion of how they understood social justice (Maslow, 1943). Participants suggested that in order for society to be just, it has to meet individuals' basic needs, for example those listed in Maslow's hierarchy (the physiological needs; the safety needs; the love, affection and belonging needs; the esteem needs; and the need for self-actualization; Maslow, 1943). Beyond this meeting of needs, the counselling psychologists interviewed also spoke of an acknowledgement or recognition of individual needs as being part of social justice. That is to say, participants suggested that both an acknowledgment that the needs of some groups of society may be different to those of the dominant group, and meeting those different needs, are important facets of society being just.

Equality of opportunities and resources were cited as being part of social justice. The participants in the current study did not elaborate on what resources or opportunities should be distributed equally, but reflected on the different groups of society across which things should be equal. Participants mentioned the importance of equality between men and women, and people with and without disabilities for example. The notion of equality is consistent with some of the theoretical literature on social

justice in counselling psychology (e.g. Chung & Bemak, 2012), but inconsistent with the large amount of literature which emphasizes equity as opposed to equality (e.g. Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Kagan et al., 2011; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Fouad et al., 2006). In terms of how this finding relates to prior research, both the two relevant studies conducted also reported that participants cited that equality, as opposed to equity, is a part of social justice (Todd & Rufa, 2012; Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010). The present findings do not suggest why this distinction between theoretical writings and individual understanding of social justice has occurred; for example we cannot say whether or not this is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the difference between equality and equity, a perception that the term equality accounts for differing needs, or whether participants actually favoured equal distribution in a strict sense over a needs based distribution.

The findings regarding counselling psychologists' understandings of social justice are broadly consistent with the one previous study which had been conducted with counselling psychologists in the US (Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010). A novel finding, however, was that the counselling psychologists interviewed included empowerment within their understanding of social justice. All six participants in the qualitative element of the present study made reference to empowerment within their descriptions of how they understood social justice. The idea that individuals within oppressed or disadvantaged groups in society should be engaged and involved in social action is consistent with the community psychology value of liberation (Kagan et al. 2011). Whilst empowerment features regularly in definitions of social justice seen in the theoretical literature (Crethar et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2004; Crethar & Winterowd, 2012), neither the research by Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) nor that by Todd and Rufa (2012) reported it as a theme within their participants' definitions of social justice. Perhaps the fact that empowerment is typically cited as a key value in counselling psychology in the UK, aside from any discussion of 'social justice' (Cooper, 2009), might have meant that UK counselling psychologists were more likely to use the term, whereas those counselling psychologists who have been exposed to a richer literature on social justice in the US may consider other elements and neglect to cite empowerment.

A consistent thread throughout the data was that participants had a very personal understanding of social justice; when speaking of the key elements in social justice one participant noted that “my understanding of the key elements comes from my experiences” (P3). Indeed, several of the participants spoke in the interviews about experiences in their personal lives which contributed to their sense and understanding of social justice. For example one participant reflected on their experience of injustice, and times in their life when they had felt oppressed or marginalized, and how this experience helped them to develop a sense of what it means for society to be just. Another found it useful to explain their understanding of social justice through personal anecdotes or stories, rather than by defining it in a theoretical or academic sense. This personal understanding and connection to social justice for those who are committed to it is consistent with research conducted by Caldwell and Vera (2010) who found that counselling psychologists’ social justice orientation may be facilitated by personal experiences such as personal experience of injustice. One of the ways in which the participants in their research suggested this facilitation occurred was by increasing their understanding of social justice (Caldwell & Vera, 2010). In addition to this, the personal reaction to issues of injustice, such as the anger and passion described by participants adds to a sense in the current findings that counselling psychologists may have a personal connection to social justice as well as a personal understanding of the term.

Whilst participants were able to describe elements of social justice and reflect on what it meant to them, the present study does highlight potential limitations in counselling psychologists’ understandings of social justice. The findings suggested that participants struggled to define the term ‘social justice’. Five out of the six participants interviewed described defining social justice as difficult in some respect; they reported not having a formal definition, struggling to pin down what it is that social justice means, and not feeling that they had the relevant terminology to define it. The fact that counselling psychologists do not have a formal definition of social justice may not be surprising when considered alongside the suggestion that formal definitions have also been largely absent in the theoretical literature in counselling psychology (Pierterse et al., 2009). Beyond just stating that it was difficult to define, participants shared their thoughts on what specifically was challenging about

defining social justice. For example, one participant stated that it was not a term they would think to use and their only contact with the term was my use of it in the context of this research project. Another said that they felt they didn't have the necessary vocabulary yet to define social justice, which may be due to the relative lack of an explicit discussion of social justice within the UK counselling psychology literature (Cutts, 2013). It is also useful to consider this alongside the finding that three participants, representing different training institutions, stated that there had been no mention of the term 'social justice' on their training courses in counselling psychology in the UK. Caldwell and Vera (2010) found that studying the area of social justice allowed counselling psychologists to develop and deepen their understanding of social justice, which, considering the lack of education regarding social justice in UK training courses, might also partly explain the struggle to define the term. Authors have commented previously that it is important for the field to be able to define social justice (Lewis, 2010). Therefore the finding that counselling psychologists with at least a moderate interest in social justice, whom one might reasonably expect to be more able than others to define the term, struggle to do so, may have an impact on any potential present or future social justice movement in the UK counselling psychology profession.

### **5.3. Counselling psychologists' levels of social justice interest and the relevance of social justice to counselling psychology**

In order to reflect on what the current research can tell us regarding counselling psychologists' levels of social justice interest and the perceived relevance of social justice to counselling psychology, findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research are considered. Qualitative findings are used to aid the interpretation of the quantitative findings, in addition to extending our understanding of the connection between social justice and counselling psychology.

Twenty-seven members of the UK counselling psychology profession completed the Social Issues Questionnaire (SIQ) in the preliminary phase of the research, and descriptive data were assessed and compared to prior research using the same questionnaire (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). The sample size in the preliminary phase of the research is in itself a finding of the present research,



which will be discussed here. Before entering on this discussion, it is important to note that the comments which follow regarding the sample size within the quantitative phase are also relevant to the following section considering the social justice commitment of counselling psychologists. Nevertheless, for clarity and to avoid repetition I will discuss this finding solely within the current section rather than in both.

The quantitative sample size necessarily means that limited conclusions can be drawn from this stage of the research, and the low response rate is therefore a key finding from the quantitative phase. Similar to other studies conducted in this area given the nature of recruitment I am unable to determine a response rate (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). Nevertheless, the research was advertised on the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology website and circulated on their email mailing list, and the research advert was also circulated to Programme Directors of all of the professional training courses in counselling psychology in the UK. There are 3,442 members of the Division of Counselling Psychology, including 922 in training members (BPS, personal communication). Therefore, one can surmise that the response rate was very low. Prior research adopted a similar sampling strategy and sample sizes were significantly higher (e.g. Beer et al., 2012). This finding leaves us with the question of why there was such a low response rate for the survey.

There are several possible explanations for the small sample which can be considered. There is a reported research-practice gap within counselling psychology which it might be useful to reflect on as a possible explanation for the small sample size (McLeod, 2001b). Practitioners in counselling psychology and related professions of counselling and psychotherapy are reported to be disengaged from research. Specifically, the literature suggests that practitioners may have little interest in research on the whole and that there is a wide gap between those who are practising counselling and the research which is published (McLeod, 2001b). Whilst focused predominantly on the use practitioners make of research findings, one might wonder if in addition to not reading research, practitioners are also not taking part in research. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether this would explain such a small response rate. Alternatively, the questionnaire may have appeared unattractive to potential participants, or difficult to complete in some way (see appendix A for

screen shots of the online questionnaire). Again, it is unclear however whether this would explain such a small response rate.

At this point of interpretation we can draw upon the findings of the qualitative phase of the research to add to our interpretation of the quantitative phase of the research. Within the qualitative phase of the research, findings indicated that members of the counselling psychology profession who are interested in social justice do not consider the profession as a whole to be interested in social justice, and they spoke of this lack of interest being demonstrated for example within publications in UK counselling psychology. Another possible explanation for the response rate is therefore that the small sample size might in itself indicate a lack of general interest in the subject of social justice within the UK counselling psychology profession. The research advert stated that I was recruiting participants for research looking at social justice in counselling psychology. Therefore a possible explanation for the small final sample might be that members of the counselling psychology profession chose not to participate in the research because they were not interested in the area of social justice. If this were the case, it would be a significant finding in relation to the purpose of the research to explore the social justice interest and commitment of members of the counselling psychology profession. Alternatively, the low response rate may be due to issues around language and the specific term ‘social justice’ used in the research advert. As discussed in the above section, qualitative findings suggested that members of the counselling psychology profession, even those with an interest in social justice, may not be clear on the meaning of the term social justice. Findings indicated that participants may not have had contact with the term social justice in their practice as a counselling psychologist, and one participant suggested that potentially they would use different terms to refer to a similar concept, such as ‘systemic factors’. The qualitative findings within the present research may then provide possible explanations for this element of the quantitative findings: the response rate may have been low due to a lack of interest in social justice, or a lack of familiarity or understanding of the term ‘social justice’. The precise reason for the small sample size is unclear. A discussion of the sample size in the preliminary phase of the research as a limitation of the project can be found in section 5.6.1., below.

As mentioned above, the small sample size means that the quantitative findings must be treated with caution and are limited in their potential to be generalized beyond the current sample. However given that no prior research has assessed levels of social justice interest and commitment within the UK counselling psychology profession, and that findings can be compared to those of previous research, the findings are of some interest and are therefore discussed. Survey data indicated that members of the UK counselling psychology profession demonstrate a moderate interest in social justice. The mean score of 5.61 indicates that on average participants marked that they had ‘medium interest’ in the social justice activities listed (for example ‘take part in a course on social issues’; ‘talk to others about social issues’; ‘select a career that deals with social issues’). Comparison with the two previous studies which have used the same measure indicated that UK-based counselling psychologists have a lower interest in social justice than trainee counselling psychologists based in the US (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; mean interest = 7.89), and scores are more akin to those of a more general sample of US college students (Miller et al. 2009; mean interest = 5.94). The findings of Miller and Sendrowitz (2011) demonstrated that US based counselling psychologists reported on average that they had ‘high interest’ in the social justice activities listed. There are several potential reasons for this finding, which I will now discuss.

The current findings also demonstrated that UK-based counselling psychologists have lower levels of both social justice self-efficacy and outcome expectations in comparison to the trainee counselling psychologists based in the US in Miller and Sendrowitz (2011). Considering the evidence which suggests that both of these factors contribute to an individual’s level of social justice interest (self-efficacy both directly and indirectly through outcome expectations, and outcome expectations directly; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011), it is perhaps unsurprising that the present results illustrate lower levels of social justice interest. Nevertheless, that still leaves us with the question of why all of these factors are lower in the current sample than in that of Miller and Sendrowitz (2011). Several studies have reported that the extent to which a counselling psychologist’s training environment is supportive and facilitative of social justice and social justice work impacts an individual’s social justice interest and commitment (Beer et al., 2012; Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Miller &

Sendrowitz, 2011). Therefore perhaps one explanation for this finding is the difference in curriculum, and more specifically, differences in the amount of teaching about social justice on UK and US counselling psychology training courses. In the qualitative element of the current study, participants commented that there was no mention of social justice as part of their professional training, and described a perception of a lack of interest in social justice in the profession. The trainees in the qualitative sample represented 3 training different institutions across the UK. Perhaps, then, drawing on the findings of the qualitative phase of the research to aid interpretation of the quantitative findings, we can suggest that the training environment in the UK does not foster an interest in social justice. Pierterse et al. (2009) investigated multicultural course syllabi on counselling psychology training courses in the US and found that social justice was a growing presence in training for counselling psychologists, although it was not consistently represented. Alternatively, the results could be due to differences in the identity of the US and UK counselling psychology professions (Moller, 2011). For example, perhaps in the US individuals with higher levels of interest in social justice may have been attracted to the counselling psychology profession because of its historical interest in social justice (Fouad et al., 2006). In contrast, in the UK discussions about the identity of counselling psychology have typically focused to date on the profession's emphasis on humanistic and phenomenological roots, as opposed to multicultural or social justice issues (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010; Moller, 2011; Cutts, 2013). Therefore individuals are perhaps less likely to be attracted to the profession because of an interest in social justice. Indeed, qualitative findings suggested that counselling psychologists who are interested in social justice perceive there to be limited evidence of an interest in social justice in the UK counselling psychology profession.

Beyond individuals' interest in social justice, the present research also aimed to explore the connection between social justice and the profession of counselling psychology. No previous research has explored the perceived relevance of social justice to UK counselling psychology, and although implicitly present in the profession, social justice has not been explicitly engaged with in the literature in the UK (Cutts, 2013). Qualitative findings extended the understanding of the levels of social justice interest in the profession, and explored this element of the topic.

Despite the lack of an explicit historical engagement with social justice, as in the US counselling psychology profession (Fouad et al., 2006), qualitative findings indicated that the UK-based counselling psychologists interviewed judged that social justice issues are wholly relevant to their profession. Meaning units from five out of the six participants' interview transcripts were assigned to the category 'social justice is completely relevant to counselling psychology'. One participant referred to social justice as "integral" to counselling psychology (P12). This is consistent with prior research from the allied profession of clinical psychology, which indicated that core socio-political ideas are perceived to be relevant to their profession (Thompson, 2007).

Two of the six participants suggested that social justice could potentially be a distinguishing feature of counselling psychology. Authors have previously suggested that a commitment to social justice is particular to counselling psychology (Vera & Speight, 2003). Nevertheless, in the present research one participant was keen to emphasize that they felt that a commitment to social justice was only a *potentially* distinguishing feature, as they felt that this was not yet realized. Indeed, participants seemed to suggest that social justice is not a unique feature of the identity of counselling psychology in the UK. Rather social justice may just be more of a feature in counselling psychology than in other branches of applied psychology, and could potentially become a greater feature of the identity of the profession in future. This relates to the perception of a lack of action within the profession, discussed in section 5.4., below. The results also indicated that counselling psychologists perceive that the philosophy of their profession and social justice are related, and the idea that the emphasis of the profession is particularly suited to a social justice perspective was discussed. Findings also suggested that there are specific social justice issues within the wider field of mental health, thus echoing the ideas of Aldarondo (2007) in the theoretical literature who discussed the wider group of mental health professionals and the engagement with social justice. Similarly, participants' responses also reflected the literature on social and cultural explanations of distress (Albee, 1969; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997), with participants arguing that as their clients are in society, they can't ignore its impact on wellbeing. Participants spoke of the potential for collusion if the unjust status quo is not

challenged, which again is consistent with much of the theoretical writing in the area (Thatcher & Manktelow, 2007).

It is worth treating the qualitative findings here with caution, as the participants interviewed were chosen because of their moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice, and therefore may not reflect the wider views of the counselling psychology profession. However, scoring highly on the SIQ does not necessarily entail that an individual judges the matters of social justice he or she is committed to and interested in to be relevant to counselling psychology, as the questionnaire is not specific to a profession. Therefore, although worth taking into account, the finding that participants judged social justice to be very relevant to counselling psychology is not necessarily negated by the sampling technique employed. Interestingly the participants did acknowledge the potential argument that social justice work might not fall under the remit of work for a counselling psychologist: participants spoke of the traditional emphasis on individual psychotherapy within the profession and the potential argument that wider interventions are not part of the job of a counselling psychologist. This argument might be supported by the fact that whilst the US professions of counselling and counselling psychology have approved advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003), and suggested social justice competencies (Constantine et al., 2007), the UK profession has not. Nevertheless this was not an argument that participants were convinced by, citing instead the above reasons for the relevance of matters of social justice to their profession.

In conclusion, the quantitative element of the present research indicated that members of the UK counselling psychology profession rate themselves as having on average a moderate interest in social justice. Nevertheless, these results should be treated with caution due to the small sample size. The response rate in the quantitative phase is considered as a key finding of the present study. Qualitative findings might help us to understand this finding, and perhaps suggest that it might illustrate a lack of social justice interest, or a lack of familiarity or understanding of the term 'social justice' within the UK counselling psychology profession. Extending beyond a quantitative understanding of levels of social justice interest, the qualitative element of the study found that there are a number of ways in which social justice is

considered to be relevant to the profession of counselling psychology. Specifically, participants consider social justice to be connected to the philosophy of counselling psychology, and a feature which might potentially distinguish the profession from other branches of applied psychology.

#### **5.4. The social justice commitment and action of counselling psychologists: A rhetoric-action gap?**

The final area of discussion relates to the social justice commitment and action of counselling psychologists in the UK. I consider here the findings relating to levels of social justice commitment, and social justice action within the profession of counselling psychology. Within this section I draw on both the quantitative and qualitative phases to draw conclusions.

Social justice commitment relates to an individual's intention to act on social justice values (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). Within the survey phase of the research, the quantitative sample of counselling psychologists demonstrated an uncertainty about whether they would commit to engage in social justice action. That is to say, the mean score of 5.18 indicated that on average participants responded as 'unsure' to the questions on the subscale (for example 'I think engaging in social justice activities is a realistic goal for me' and 'I am fully committed to engaging in social justice activities'). The quantitative findings, as aforementioned, are to be treated with caution given the small sample size. It is unclear whether the findings would be generalizable to a wider sample of counselling psychologists. Nevertheless, when compared to prior studies, the results are again lower than previous research with US-based counselling psychology trainees (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; mean commitment = 7.84), and more akin to the findings of Miller et al. (2009) whose participants were US-based college students from numerous disciplines (mean commitment = 4.60). This is perhaps unsurprising when considered alongside the above findings regarding social justice interest, as research indicates that social justice interest exerts a direct effect on social justice commitment (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). The findings further suggested that there is considerable variation amongst members of the counselling psychology profession with respect to their level of commitment to social justice. The scores ranged from 1 to 9 on the subscale

(maximum range 0-9). Scores ranged from 3-9 on social justice interest, indicating a smaller level of variation on self-reported levels of interest in social justice. There were also differences in variation on the social justice commitment subscale when the separate items on the scale were considered; on average participants scored themselves as between unsure and disagreeing with the statement 'I have a plan of action for ways I will remain or become involved in social justice activities over the next year', and between unsure and agreeing with the statement 'In the future I intend to engage in social justice activities'. Taken together these findings might suggest that some individuals may be interested in social justice issues but do not fully commit to engaging in social justice action, by for example considering how to take the next step.

The interview participants reported a perception of a lack of social justice action in the wider profession. Within this, several different perspectives were offered, which extend the understanding of the uncertainty around commitment seen in the quantitative findings. For example, comments were made referring to there being no evidence of an interest in social justice. Counselling psychologists drew on the lack of literature in the UK as evidence to back up this claim, for example the lack of attention paid to social justice within the *Handbook of Counselling Psychology*. Some participants also reflected on seeing evidence of an interest in social justice but a lack of any action within the profession: one participant questioned whether counselling psychology has "dropped the ball" (P10). This reflects concerns seen in the US literature regarding a nominal interest in social justice not backed up by any commitment to engage in social justice action (Baluch et al., 2004). This finding cannot tell us whether there is a lack of social justice action within the profession or not. Nevertheless considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings, it does appear that social justice action is perhaps not a large part of the counselling psychology profession in the UK.

Integrating the findings from the qualitative phase enables elaboration of our understanding of the levels of social justice commitment found. Specifically, the qualitative findings highlighted several potential issues counselling psychologists might face when considering engaging in social justice action. The potential barriers or issues involved with engaging in social justice action raised by participants may



give some indication of what factors hinder social justice action within the profession. Consistent with previous research, UK based counselling psychologists reported finding that the context of their job can limit opportunities to engage in social justice work (Beer et al., 2012), and, whereas prior findings have been limited to a trainee counselling psychologist sample, the present sample includes a qualified counselling psychologist, indicating that these professional issues can arise at various points of an individual's career. Findings also indicated that counselling psychologists may struggle to be consistent in their social justice action. The difficulty of remaining consistent and acting in accordance with social justice values, the issue of having time to give to social justice action and the need to take care of one's self rather than always thinking of others and risking burn-out were highlighted by the counselling psychologists interviewed. Overall, results echoed the finding described by Beer et al. (2012) which was that social justice was a 'struggle'. An illustration of this struggle can be seen in one participant's comment that engaging in social justice action can feel like hitting a "brick wall" (P12).

Participants in the qualitative phase also suggested that there are issues with certain theoretical models which mean that social justice action is less easily accommodated by their role. Findings indicated that counselling psychologists might find it difficult to engage in social justice action when working within person-centred, cognitive-behavioural and psychodynamic traditions. No previous research has investigated the issues involved in engaging with social justice action in counselling psychology, but this finding is consistent with theoretical literature (Tolleson, 2009; Lago, 2011; Guilfoyle, 2008). The three models which were mentioned by participants have all been criticized in the literature for having an overly individualistic emphasis (Ivey & Collins, 2003). These findings also perhaps sit alongside those of Thompson (2007), whose participants questioned how socio-political ideas could be acted upon within the role of a clinical psychologist. This suggests that it may be difficult to practise social justice in counselling psychology whilst working from either a cognitive-behavioural, person-centred or psychodynamic model of therapy. This finding is perhaps most surprising in relation to the person-centred tradition, as there has been evidence of a consideration of social justice issues from within this model (Proctor et al., 2006; Gillon, 2007; Spangenberg, 2003). Indeed, it should be noted that the

person-centred model was also discussed in the opposite sense. That is to say, participants referred to both the consistency between humanistic values and social justice as well as to a feeling that when working from a Rogerian perspective you neglect the importance of the wider social climate.

Although the qualitative findings do demonstrate that there is a perception of a lack of social justice action within the UK counselling psychology profession as discussed above, they also build on the quantitative findings relating to social justice commitment and illustrate ways in which some counselling psychologists are managing to act on their social justice values. Therefore, I move on now to consider the findings relating to the ways in which a commitment to social justice might manifest for a counselling psychologist, and thus draw more on the qualitative findings. Similar to the findings of Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) the current results suggest that counselling psychologists who demonstrate an interest in and commitment to social justice struggle to separate their personal and professional practice of social justice. Whilst some types of social justice action such as considering social and cultural factors in formulation clearly fell into the professional realm for participants, other forms of social justice action such as talking about and challenging injustice were referenced in both personal and professional settings. Indeed, all interview participants cited talking about and challenging injustice as being one way their social justice interest manifests in action. This echoes the finding of Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) regarding counselling psychologists acting by ‘consciousness raising’, and demonstrates that UK counselling psychologists are engaging in some of the social justice action suggested in the Goodman et al. (2004) principles. Similarly, it is consistent with Beer et al. (2012), who found that trainee counselling psychologists confront family and friends regarding matters of perceived injustice. The category regarding social justice being a way of life or attitude reflects the findings of Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) who used the phrase “walking the talk” (p. 782) to describe participants’ reflections that social justice is a commitment which is manifest and weaves through the different areas of their lives. The current findings therefore suggest that counselling psychologists with at least a moderate interest in social justice engage in both personal and professional

practice of social justice, and perhaps view their commitment to social justice as a way of life rather than as distinct actions.

One of the categories of action found, ‘involvement in specific groups, organisations or campaigns outside of counselling psychology’ reflects the broad range of action participants were involved in outside of counselling psychology. Although half of the participants made reference to the political nature of social justice, only one participant described engaging in political action, such as taking part in protests and involvement in trade unions. This is in contrast to prior research in which participants have discussed involvement in protests and the use of politics as the venue for social change (Beer et al., 2012; Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010). Four out of seven participants in the study by Beer et al. (2012) discussed involvement in political organisations and activities. Similarly, participants in the study by Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010) suggested that social justice activism, described as political actions on behalf of oppressed groups, was a way for them to personally practice social justice. The current finding is, however, consistent with research from within the profession of clinical psychology in the UK which suggested that individuals are concerned about how psychologists can engage with politics, and that trainee clinical psychologists are unsure about how much of a role radical socio-political ideas such as “promoting social justice” have in clinical psychology (Thompson, 2007, p. 70).

Despite the emphasis in the theoretical literature on engaging in advocacy work and stepping outside of the traditional therapeutic frame with clients as a way of practising social justice (for example see Constantine et al., 2007), only half of the qualitative sample described examples of this in their work. Therefore although this indicates that counselling psychologists are engaging in some advocacy work, it is not one of the most commonly reported ways of acting on social justice values in the profession. This finding is not consistent with the study by Thompson et al. (2012) who suggested that therapists engaged in numerous social justice actions beyond the traditional therapeutic frame such as advocacy work, nor research which suggests that counsellors in schools engage in social justice action through advocating on behalf of students (Singh, Urbano, et al., 2010). Both of these previous studies however were conducted in the US, where the ACA have published an approved list of advocacy competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003). It may

therefore be the case that these findings could be explained by the lack of guidance in the UK for a counselling psychologist who wishes to engage in work outside of the counselling room. Nevertheless, the reason for the lack of reported advocacy work is unclear from the present findings.

It is interesting that despite the lack of explicit discussion of social justice in the UK counselling psychology profession (Cutts, 2013) the interview participants cited numerous examples of ways in which they were involved in social justice work as counselling psychologists. However these participants were sampled for their moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice. Research suggests that an intention to engage in social justice related behaviours is predictive of self-reported past and present social justice activity (Torres-Harding, Siers & Olsen, 2012). It is unclear therefore whether this finding would generalize to the wider UK counselling psychology profession, outside of those with moderate to high commitment to social justice. Furthermore, as Torres-Harding et al. (2012) note regarding their research, the current methodology relied on self-reports and therefore did not directly assess social justice action. Despite these limitations, these new findings do at least indicate that some members of the counselling psychology profession in the UK are engaging in social justice action in part within their professional role. This is a novel finding as the one prior published study which assessed this was conducted with US based counselling psychologists (Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010).

In conclusion, quantitative findings regarding how members of the UK counselling psychology rate their level of social justice commitment indicated that they were on average unsure about engaging in social justice action. As discussed above, these results should be treated with caution due to the small sample size. Nevertheless, qualitative findings regarding how a commitment to social justice might manifest in counselling psychology may help us to understand this level uncertainty, as a number of potential issues with engaging in social justice were highlighted. In addition to this, qualitative findings extended our understanding of a commitment to social justice in counselling psychology by illustrating a number of ways in which members of the counselling psychology profession are already acting on social justice values within their lives both in and outside of their professional roles.

## **5.5 Implications of the findings for the wider counselling psychology profession**

Within this section of the discussion I aim to reflect on and digest some of the implications which the findings of the research have for the wider counselling psychology profession, particularly with regards to the profession's identity and status, and issues of power. The current findings suggest that there is not a wide interest in social justice within the UK counselling psychology profession. There are several findings which contribute to this conclusion. Specifically, qualitative participants indicated that they viewed there to be limited evidence of an interest in social justice in the wider profession and that issues of social justice are not discussed within training programmes. Furthermore, whilst limited, quantitative findings suggested that there may be a lower interest in social justice in the UK than in the US. Finally, one interpretation of the low response rate in the quantitative phase may be that counselling psychologists were not interested in taking part in research on the subject of social justice. Speight and Vera (2004) describe how embracing a social justice agenda in counselling psychology involves working towards a just society and challenging the systems of oppression in society. Do the current findings therefore indicate that counselling psychologists in the UK do not wish to engage in such a task, and that this is not part of our profession's identity?

These findings have worrying implications for the wider profession, particularly with regards to issues of our use of power as professionals. As discussed within the literature review, psychologists, including counselling psychologists, hold a great amount of power in society and relationships (Morrall, 2008; Parker, 1999; Prilleltensky, 1997). As professional psychologists, we are given power because of our privileged position as 'professionals' and through psychology's continuing alignment with medicine and healthcare. We often work with those who are in powerless positions in society, given where they are located in the social structure as 'clients', 'patients' or 'service users', or 'people with mental health problems' (Morrall, 2008). If we are not interested in issues of social justice, including factors such as equality, fairness, and distributive justice, as the current findings may suggest, what does this mean with regards to counselling psychologists' use of

power? Within the UK counselling psychology literature, attention has been paid to equality in the counselling relationship, encouraging a move away from the ‘expert’ position of the therapist, and encouraging instead collaboration with clients (see for example Cooper & McLeod, 2011). Nevertheless, the current findings might suggest that we are engaging less with discussions around our social power as psychologists (Spong, 2012). Authors such as Morrall (2008) have argued that individual therapy is fundamentally abusive, due to the power exerted by the therapist over the client. A social justice approach encourages recognition of the socio-cultural roots of distress, and community interventions as opposed to a purely individualistic approach (Goodman et al., 2004; Parker, 2007; Kagan et al., 2011). So if counselling psychology is not interested in or committed to matters of social justice, are we abusing our power as professionals, and in effect, maintaining the status quo of unfavourable conditions such as inequality and oppression within our society (Vera & Speight, 2003)?

The findings of this research have implications for the identity of the UK counselling psychology profession. The research found that social justice action is not a large part of the profession in the UK. Counselling psychology is said to have a humanistic ethic and value base at its core (Cooper, 2009; Gillon, 2007; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). However, authors have also noted that it is “full of paradoxes and challenges” and debates regarding the identity of the profession are ongoing (Kasket & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 21). This research contributes to these dialogues around identity, by indicating that whilst some counselling psychologists view social justice as part of their professional identity, the wider profession does not appear to share this sentiment, as indicated by the limited social justice interest and commitment. Perhaps then, we might conclude that UK counselling psychology has been found “woefully and indeed shamefully lacking” with regards to a focus on social justice as well as on multicultural issues, as previously highlighted by Moller (2011, p. 14). Indeed, if the profession were to adopt an explicit social justice agenda, several current practices would need to be examined and challenged (Cutts, 2013). For example, are we as a profession both willing and ready to challenge some of the issues raised by the participants in the qualitative phase of this research, in order to engage in wider social justice action in the profession? The current findings suggest

that this might not be the case. This also has relevance to discussions around boundaries between, and the distinctive identities of, the applied psychology professions in the UK. Although research suggests that counselling psychologists consider themselves to be mavericks and to be different in some way from other branches of applied psychology (Moore & Rae, 2009), it appears that perhaps we are more similar than we would like to think to, for example, the allied profession of clinical psychology, which has voiced concerns about a socio-political approach in their discipline (Thompson, 2007).

It is important in these discussions not to forget that the sample of counselling psychologists within the qualitative phase, sampled for their high levels of social justice interest and commitment, did cite numerous ways in which they have acted on their social justice values as part of their professional role. Nevertheless as discussed above, within this there was limited evidence of an engagement with advocacy or political action. Sherman (1984) reflected on the lack of engagement with revolutionary methods of affecting social change within the counselling psychology literature. Despite the presence of social action described, for example considering cultural and social factors in formulation, talking with the client about the impact of society, and talking about and challenging injustice in and outside of counselling psychology, is there still a gap between social justice rhetoric and action in UK counselling psychology? Consistent with this, participants in the qualitative phase suggested that social justice values appear to be present in the profession, but that these values are not necessarily acted on more widely. This lack of action is problematic for the profession. In fact, I would argue that it is worse to say you are interested in and committed to social justice as a discipline, and then not act on this interest and commitment (that is to say, to behave in a way which is at odds with what you say), than to openly state that you aren't interested in and committed to social justice, and therefore won't be engaging in social justice action (that is to say, have a consistency between your speech and actions).

In conclusion, within this section of the discussion I have considered the implications of the findings of the research for the wider counselling psychology profession. Building on the first three sections of this discussion chapter therefore, I have raised a concern regarding the worrying implications of the findings and

conclusions drawn from this project. Specifically, I have considered the potential implications for the UK counselling psychology profession of the lack of social justice interest and commitment, and whether this might constitute an abuse of our power as counselling psychologists. In addition to reflecting on issues of power and the wider profession, I have also discussed the implications of the findings in relation to the identity of the profession, with reference to both the perceived humanistic and maverick nature of counselling psychology, and the distinctiveness of the profession as a branch of applied psychology in the UK.

## **5.6. Methodological discussion**

Whilst this research does add to the body of literature considering social justice within the field of counselling psychology, it is not without limitations. Within this section of the chapter I therefore consider a number of potential methodological weaknesses of the project. In the first subsection contained within this I consider the mixed methods nature of the project, and as part of this I discuss the limitations of the quantitative phase of the research. Following this I reflect on the procedures of data analysis used in the qualitative stage of the project, and finally I discuss issues of power within the research.

### ***5.6.1. The mixed methods nature of the project***

Within the mixed methods explanatory sequential design there are a number of methodological issues to consider (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova et al. 2006; Ivankova, 2013). When assessing the quality of inferences drawn from an explanatory sequential design one needs to consider the quality of both phases in addition to the connection of the two phases (Ivankova, 2013). In the present study the qualitative phase was the priority, with the preliminary phase used to collect initial quantitative data on levels of social justice interest and commitment and to sample for the second phase. There are several methodological weaknesses of the quantitative phase to consider, which, because they impact upon the quality of the quantitative phase therefore impact upon the mixed methods nature of the project.



There are several issues relating to the sample within the quantitative phase. Firstly, the sample in this preliminary stage of the research was self-selecting. The research was advertised on the DCoP website and through email from the same organization to its members. Posters were also distributed via University staff working on counselling psychology training programmes. The research advert which was circulated stated explicitly that I was recruiting for participants to take part in a study looking at social justice in counselling psychology (see Appendix C). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that it is possible that participants were biased towards a greater interest in social justice, which could skew the findings. As discussed above however, the findings only indicated a moderate interest in social justice, which would not necessarily support this hypothesis. Nevertheless without further research with a broader, probability based sample, we cannot determine whether or not the sample used biased the findings. A second, connected issue is that the final sample consisted of only 27 participants. This is an interesting finding of the research as discussed above. Despite this it is also a limitation of the quantitative phase, because this meant there was limited data to analyse, and that the findings presented are limited to descriptive statistics of a small sample of 27 members of the counselling psychology profession. It is important to recognize this as a limitation of the research because although some tentative conclusions may be drawn as discussed above, these need to be viewed predominantly as preliminary findings to be treated with caution, as they may not generalize to the wider counselling psychology profession in the UK. There are several potential explanations for the sample size, as discussed in section 5.3., above.

The second potential methodological weakness with the preliminary stage of the research is the use of the SIQ. Prior to the publication of the SIQ, research in the area used alternative measures. For example, Beer et al. (2012) used the Activism Orientation Scale (Corning & Myers 2002) and the Confronting Discrimination subscale of the Social Issues Advocacy Scale (Nilsson, Marszalek, Linnemeyer, Bahner, & Misialek, 2011) to measure social justice commitment. They commented in their discussion that their study highlighted the need for improvement in quantitative measures of social justice commitment and made reference to the SIQ as a potential measure. Only two published studies used the SIQ, both of which were

conducted in the US. There are therefore potential questions around whether or not this questionnaire measure is appropriate for a UK based sample, or whether a more culturally appropriate measure is necessary. With permission from the author (Miller, 2011, personal communication) I amended one point on the social justice interest subscale in order to account for cultural differences: the reference to Big Brother/ Big Sister schemes was removed from one question. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the measure is appropriate for a UK based sample and further work in this area would need to be done in order to answer this question.

The limitations of the quantitative phase necessarily impacted upon the level of mixing within this mixed methods project. Mixing occurred at participant selection and at the interpretation phase, and the data strands were not mixed at the point of data analysis (Ivankova et al., 2006). Due to the limitations of the quantitative phase, the findings from this stage were necessarily drawn on less within the interpretation of the research as a whole. This is consistent with the study design, because as discussed above the qualitative phase took priority in the research, and a participant-selection variant of the design was adopted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) due to the interest in exploring how social justice is understood and acted on within the profession. Nevertheless it does impact the mixed methods nature of the project, and therefore needs to be taken into account when evaluating the study as whole.

#### ***5.6.2. The procedures of qualitative data analysis***

The second area for discussion I will focus on is the procedures of qualitative data analysis which were utilised in the project. The present study used techniques from the grounded theory approach to analyse the qualitative data gathered in the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Rennie et al., 1988). There are a number of points for discussion in relation to this. Firstly, in traditional grounded theory projects, the researcher has minimal familiarity with the literature in the area of study prior to initiating the research (Fassinger, 2005). This can be a challenge given the research environment, for example because of the need to compile a detailed research proposal for academic panels or ethics committees. Fassinger (2005, p. 158) describes how a delicate balance is aimed for:

between enough knowledge to focus the sampling and data collection effectively and yet not so much immersion in existing perspectives that the investigation becomes circumscribed by preordained constructs and limited expectations

In this project the literature review was a lengthy process. The process of collecting and reading the relevant citations began in approximately November 2010, followed by writing a research proposal and presenting it to a number of academic staff who judged the quality of the proposal in July 2011, and finally beginning to collect data in November 2011. Therefore I had engaged with the literature prior to a substantial degree prior to collecting and analysing the data. According to traditional grounded theory projects this would have an impact on my findings, potentially making them less trustworthy (Fassinger, 2005). Several measures were adopted in the research in order to try and limit the potential influence of my familiarity with the literature. Specifically, I took part in a bracketing interview prior to data collection, recorded any assumptions and biases which arose throughout the project in a journal and conducted member checks with participants following data analysis. It was hoped that these procedures would limit the impact of my knowledge of the literature. Although inevitably it is impossible to state for certain whether or not these procedures were successful, given my surprise at some of the findings in the present research I am comforted that the findings were not significantly circumscribed by my expectations going into the project.

A further potential discussion point in relation to the use of grounded theory analytic techniques within the present project is the choice to adopt the technique of coding for ‘meaning units’. David Rennie and colleagues describe their use of coding for meaning units as opposed to the traditional method of analysing a transcript line by line, and argue that this is a more “workable” method (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 1988). But what is a meaning unit? As Fassinger (2005) points out, in the literature the length of a coded meaning unit can vary substantially, ranging from as small as a word up to a paragraph of text. Coding for meaning units as opposed to the line-by-line method advocated by Glaser (1978) therefore necessitates that the analysis is less systematic, as meaning units may vary in size, and the judgement is down to the individual coder. I found in my analysis of the data that the size of meaning unit did

vary as Fassinger (2005) suggested, from a word up to a short paragraph. As discussed in the methodology chapter, this method may suffer from criticisms regarding the rigour or systematic nature of the analytic process as it is potentially less replicable than a line by line approach. Despite this, the choice to code for meaning units, although less systematic perhaps, did hopefully limit the potential for sacrificing some of the intended meaning of the data, which is a risk with line by line coding (Rennie & Fergus, 2006). My experience throughout the coding process was that the flexibility allowed by this approach did mean that I could keep to the participants' intended meanings rather than in effect fracturing meanings across lines. Rennie et al. (1988) comment that "[t]he choice of an analytic unit is somewhat arbitrary but, once defined by a given set of investigators, should be clearly explicated and consistently used." Having completed the project I am happy with the decision to code for meaning units as opposed to adopting the line by line approach. I consider the benefits of limiting the sacrificing of meaning to outweigh any potential drawbacks discussed above.

### ***5.6.3. Power in research***

As reflected in the literature review, the issue of power and the distribution of power across society are often discussed within the field of social justice and counselling psychology. Authors have focused on the use and misuse of power (Chung & Bemak, 2012), oppression (Prilleltensky, 1997) and how power can be managed within the domain of therapy (Spong, 2012). A parallel is present between these discussions and similar discussions taking place in literature on research methods, which reflect on power dynamics, and the use and misuse of power in the domain of research. Haverkamp (2005) makes this link between issues of power in practice and research in counselling psychology explicit in the following quote:

From the perspective of my practitioner self, I am sensitive to, and concerned about, the asymmetrical power relationship that exists between researcher and participant, despite our best intention to transform participants into "coresearchers". (p. 146).

Within the current project, part of the personal process for me was the realization of my power as the researcher, particularly with regards to methodological choices and putting these choices into practice. As aforementioned, a critical perspective to psychology encourages us to engage in self-examination with regards to our power as psychologists (Steffen & Hanley, 2013). Within this section I therefore reflect on the issue of my power in relation to the research methodology, and the tensions I held as a researcher conducting this project.

In the process of research design I made the decision to adopt what could be viewed as a ‘top down’ approach; that is to say, I chose to focus specifically on ‘social justice’ and therefore decided upon a specific focus and agenda for the research. A more ‘bottom up’, phenomenological approach might have involved speaking with counselling psychologists more generally about what is important to them about the profession, and seeing whether or not thoughts about social justice emerged from these discussions. I chose to adopt a specific focus for the research project given the study aims and purpose, and the conclusions drawn from the literature review. Despite making this decision, given the qualitative research question and therefore the desire to hear participants’ views and perspectives, it was important for me to try to balance this ‘top down’ element of the research and emphasize the importance of the participants’ perspectives. Therefore I held a tension within me as the researcher between this ‘top down’ approach and wanting to put the participants’ in centre stage. Another element of this ‘top down’ approach is that it provokes questions about the power dynamics in research, specifically in the relationship between researcher and participant. In choosing a focus for the research I exerted my power as researcher. Given the focus of the project on social justice, emphasizing equality and power sharing, and my own perspective regarding this and critical approaches to psychology, this was certainly a tension which was present for me in the research process.

In the process of data collection I also had cause to reflect on the power dynamics in the relationship between myself and those individuals taking part in the study. One of the additional comments I received from a participant within the interview was that they had felt as if they “should understand what social justice is” when asked how they understood the term and what it meant to them. They said that they had not

felt uncomfortable, but had begun to think that they didn't know exactly what the literature said about social justice and was being asked by someone who was researching the subject and therefore potentially had engaged with the literature to a greater extent. This was in the pilot interview and it was not an issue that was voiced in any of the further interviews. This was something I attempted to manage using a number of strategies. Firstly I became sensitive to the manner in which I asked the research questions, and was keen to emphasize to participants that I wasn't looking for text book definitions or to test their knowledge of the literature around social justice, but rather I wanted to hear from them how they understood social justice.

Several methodological decisions were made in order to attempt to work with the tension I experienced between this 'top down' approach and giving a focus to participants' perceptions, and to attempt to balance the power balance between myself and participants. For example whilst planning the research I chose to adopt a semi-structured approach to the design of the interview protocol, which aimed to create a more equal power dynamic (Spong, 2011). Additionally, the process of the member check after the initial analyses allowed me to give participants a chance to reflect on my understanding of what they had said and the accuracy of my coding. Unfortunately only three of six the participants did return the member check form but those who did appeared to engage with the process, and one participant in particular reflected on how they had thought about social justice and how it fits with themselves personally and their profession since the interview. Finally, the use of grounded theory techniques of data analysis, which adopt a more 'bottom up' process, enabled me to emphasize the importance of the participants' experiences and their themes in the data, rather than imposing my own categories (McLeod, 2001a). Therefore, within the current project, active efforts were made to manage the tension present in the research and the inherent power imbalance present in the research process.

## **5.7. Personal reflections**

Within the first chapter of this thesis I described my personal interest in the area of social justice in counselling psychology. In this section of the final chapter of the project I reflect on the impact the project has had on me. As part of this it is useful to consider the wider context in which the research has taken place. This research has been conducted as part of a wider project I have undertaken: to complete a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and qualify as a counselling psychologist. This has meant that alongside this research I have undertaken over 450 hours of supervised therapeutic practice and completed many other assessed aspects of the course. On a wider scale, the research has been completed as changes to the NHS have been planned in the UK, and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 has been passed, along with numerous changes to the benefits system. The combination of these factors has meant that I have conducted the research alongside working within a changing NHS, with clients who have often been marginalized in some way and are struggling in a changing society. This has made for an interesting experience.

I have at many times felt frustrated with what I have seen as my relatively narrow role as a psychologist, I have often felt unclear about my identity as a practitioner, and I have felt restricted and helpless in the face of problems external to my counselling room. Another contextual factor is that I have been entering into the counselling psychology profession in the UK in this time, and meeting others in the profession. In a way I am left feeling more uncertain about the place of social justice in counselling psychology. Questions such as whether a social justice approach can fit in counselling psychology and if so what it might look like remain present for me. Alongside all of this however I have felt deeply impressed by the thoughts and actions of participants I interviewed in the second stage of the research, and this did leave me with a sense of hope. Overall it has been a challenging, interesting and rewarding project and, as will be discussed in the next section, as a researcher I have been left with not only conclusions from the present research, but also thoughts about avenues which future research might explore.

## **5.8. Directions for future research**

This study has highlighted that there are several directions for future research which may be fruitful to consider. Within this section I outline four of these possible future avenues for investigation: different perspectives on social justice and UK counselling psychology; a longitudinal perspective; a larger scale studying using the Social Issues Questionnaire (SIQ); and participatory action research.

### ***5.8.1. Different perspectives on social justice and UK counselling psychology***

The current research interviewed a sample of six members of the counselling psychology profession about social justice in counselling psychology. This was the first study to focus on social justice with members of the UK counselling psychology profession. The findings predominantly reflected the views of trainee counselling psychologists however; as only one qualified counselling psychologist was included in the final qualitative sample. This is also a weakness of prior work, as a large amount of the literature specifically recruited trainee counselling psychologists (Beer et al., 2012; Singh, Hofsess et al., 2010; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). Therefore future work could focus on qualified members of the counselling psychology profession and explore their views on social justice and its relation to the profession. The present sample also consisted of predominantly British members of the UK counselling psychology profession, and all of the participants were white. Although in qualitative research the aim is not necessarily to gather data from a sample and generalise to the wider population (Creswell et al., 2007), talking with members of the UK counselling psychology with different backgrounds might expand our understanding of the topic. Additionally, whilst the study aimed to explore UK counselling psychology, all of the six interview participants were based in England, thus it is unclear whether the qualitative findings could be generalised to counselling psychologists in other areas of the UK. This is an area for future research. Furthermore, the focus on those with moderate to high levels of social justice interest and commitment means that the voice of those members of the counselling psychology profession with limited interest in social justice, who perhaps have a different perspective on the place of social justice within the profession, is not heard. This is also the case with much of the prior research in the US (Beer et al., 2012;



Caldwell & Vera, 2010). Future research might focus on members of the counselling psychology profession with varying degrees of interest in social justice. In conclusion, as this area of research is in its infancy, continued exploration of more diverse samples of members of the counselling psychology profession in the UK would broaden our understanding of the place of social justice within the profession.

#### ***5.8.2. A longitudinal perspective***

The present findings illuminated a number of the ways in which some members of the counselling psychology profession in the UK report that they are acting on their social justice values at a single time point. Further research might adopt a longitudinal perspective and explore the social justice intentions and subsequent action of members of the counselling psychology profession over a given period of time. As well as allowing for investigation of how intentions for future social justice action translate into behaviour or not, this may allow for further exploration of the potential issues which arise in the process of social justice action for a counselling psychologist.

#### ***5.8.3. The Social Issues Questionnaire***

Given the limitations discussed above with relation to the preliminary stage of the present research, a final avenue for future research to explore may be a wider scale study using the SIQ to assess social justice interest and commitment in a UK based sample. For example, a replication of the research of Miller and Sendrowitz (2011) using a UK sample of counselling psychologists may be a useful starting point in this area. This would provide the field with quantitative data on the social justice interest and commitment of a large sample of counselling psychologists in the UK, as well as assessing the social-cognitive model proposed by Miller et al. (2009). Future research in this area might also consider how to advertise the study in order to overcome any potential selection bias which might occur towards those who are interested in social justice.

#### ***5.8.4. Participatory action research***

Authors particularly within the field of community psychology have begun to conduct ‘participatory action research’ (Goodley & Lawthom, 2005), an approach which challenges the distinction between the researcher and the researched and involves participants actively in the research process, including for example consultation regarding research methods (e.g. Duckett et al., 2010). This was considered at the outset of the project and disregarded due to the emphasis of the approach on working with oppressed groups and communities (Goodley & Lawthom, 2005). Nevertheless, future work in this area might consider adopting a participatory action research methodology with members of the counselling psychology profession because the “fundamental difference” between the approach and other research methodologies is that participants, or members of the community, decide on the research methods used (Brydon-Miller, 1997). Bearing in mind therefore the above reflections on power in research, this may be an appropriate and fruitful avenue of further research.

### **5.9. Recommendations**

A number of recommendations are made on the basis of the current project. These all assume as a starting point that the field of counselling psychology wishes to engage further with issues of social justice (see Cutts (2013) for a discussion of the issue of engagement within the profession). The recommendations have been divided into the following sections which I now explore in turn: theoretical recommendations; training recommendations; and practice recommendations. I attempt to demonstrate the specific findings which serve as evidence for the recommendations contained within these sections, as well as outlining the rationale.

#### ***5.9.1. Theoretical recommendations***

One theoretical recommendation arises as a result of this project. Specifically, the literature review conducted suggested that there is no clear, accepted definition of social justice in the literature in counselling psychology. Some authors have attempted to articulate a precise definition, whilst many others focus on the key

elements involved in social justice (Pieterse et al., 2009). Despite having at least moderate interest in social justice, the participants in the qualitative element of the current study struggled to define the term social justice, and cited numerous ways in which it was difficult. On the basis of the findings and the literature conducted therefore I would recommend that concerted efforts should be continued in the theoretical literature in counselling psychology to define and delineate the concept of social justice. Previously, Lewis (2010) has argued that this lack of specificity in the literature can be problematic for training programmes in counselling psychology. I suggest that this is a problem not just for training programmes in counselling psychology, but also for the wider field of social justice in counselling psychology. Research suggests that one way in which critical incidents may facilitate a commitment to social justice is through developing an understanding of the concept (Caldwell & Vera, 2010). Furthermore, the lack of specificity may mean that authors may speak at cross purposes without being aware, and lead to a sense of vagueness around the topic. This issue also relates to the multicultural literature because, as previously discussed, the line between social justice and multiculturalism is occasionally blurred in the literature (Collins & Arthur, 2010b). This is a similar suggestion to that which arose from the study conducted by Singh, Hofsess et al. (2010).

### ***5.9.2. Training recommendations***

In order to develop the commitment to social justice present within UK counselling psychology, trainers may wish to modify current training curriculums to incorporate an element of social justice training. This might, for example, focus around the proposed social justice competencies (Constantine et al., 2007) and consider the guidelines for engaging in social justice action within counselling psychology (Goodman et al., 2004). Trainers might look to the wealth of theoretical literature which outlines potential considerations (e.g. Burnes & Singh, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Toporek & Vaughn, 2010). For example, authors have highlighted the importance of weaving social justice throughout a training programme as opposed to delivery of one off lectures on the subject (Lewis, 2010).

There are several pieces of evidence from the present study which support this recommendation. Firstly, the qualitative findings suggest that at least for the current sample, an explicit consideration of 'social justice' did not form part of the training of counselling psychologists in the UK. Although the sample represented three different training institutions, due to the small sample size and nature of the project it is unclear whether this is true of all training institutes in the UK. Nevertheless the finding that trainees did not feel that a consideration of social justice or the power dynamics in a wider societal sense formed part of their training can be considered alongside the findings of previous research which indicate that training is an important factor in the development of a commitment to social justice (Beer et al., 2012; Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011). The current findings therefore add to the argument that training is important for counselling psychologists wishing to engage in social justice. Changes to the current UK curriculum might ensure that social justice constitutes part of the core practice of a counselling psychologist, rather than as an additional area one wants to develop, as suggested by one of the participants in this research. A second reason for this recommendation is that findings suggested that members of the counselling psychology profession struggle to define social justice. Explicit training on social justice theory and practice would potentially foster an environment where learning about what social justice means can occur, and evidence suggests that a commitment to social justice can be facilitated through developing an understanding of social justice (Caldwell & Vera, 2010).

### ***5.9.3. Practice recommendations***

The qualitative findings within the research illuminate a number of ways in which counselling psychologists are acting on their social justice values, as well as a number of ways in which counselling psychologists consider professionals may be involved in social justice work. Arising from this there are therefore several recommendations for the practice of counselling psychologists. All but one of the participants spoke of the way in which counselling psychologists can use their power as professionals to help their clients who occupy powerless positions. The recommendation here, then, is that counselling psychologists continue to be involved in managerial positions or occupy positions on boards in order to influence the

systems in which they work. The importance of facing and talking about injustice was highlighted as being important, which sits alongside the finding that the counselling psychologists interviewed all perceived their commitment to social justice to be manifest in the way they talk about and challenge injustices. It is recommended therefore that this is a way in which counselling psychologists might begin to act on their social justice values both inside and outside their role as a professional. Several further recommendations for practice arise from the suggestions of the counselling psychologists interviewed, which include engaging in advocacy and broader interventions for example. The current findings also suggest that support and supervision when attempting to engage in social justice action as a counselling psychologist are important. Therefore it is also recommended that practitioners both seek appropriate supervision and support for their social justice work, and potentially supervise or support others engaged in social justice work in counselling psychology (Glossoff & Durham, 2010). There are two pieces of evidence for the importance of this recommendation. Firstly it is apparent given the issues regarding the challenge of social justice in terms of going against the mainstream, self-care boundaries and the challenge of consistency. Secondly, the findings suggest that UK trainee counselling psychologists are not explicitly supported to learn about social justice.

## **5.10. Chapter summary**

Within this chapter I have hopefully brought together the main elements of the research and provided the reader with a clear understanding of the conclusions drawn from the project and future directions proposed. I have done this initially by discussing the core findings from the research and relating these findings to the prior research and theoretical literature in the area of social justice and counselling psychology. The main discussion focused on findings relating to three core areas. I initially considered the findings relating to the way in which counselling psychologists' understand social justice. I discussed the way in which findings suggested that on the whole, counselling psychologists in the UK define social justice in a way which is consistent with both the research conducted in the US and the theoretical literature. Minor differences centre on the inclusion of empowerment in participants' understandings of the concept. Findings indicated weaknesses in counselling psychologists' understandings of the term 'social justice', which is unsurprising given the lack of specificity in the theoretical literature. I then moved on to a discussion of counselling psychologists' level of social justice interest and the perceived relevance of social justice to the profession of counselling psychology. I concluded that findings illustrate that some members of the counselling psychology profession consider social justice to be relevant to the profession in a number of ways. Nevertheless, by integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings it was suggested that there are perhaps not high levels of social justice interest across the profession, which might be explained by a lack of interest, or a lack of understanding of, or familiarity with, the term social justice. Finally, I reflected on the issue of counselling psychologists' level of social justice commitment and social justice action and discussed the large amount of social justice action that UK counselling psychologists report being involved in. Findings indicate however that there is a perceived lack of engagement with social justice in the UK counselling psychology profession as a whole, and qualitative participants reflected on several issues which might prohibit social justice action in the role of a counselling psychologist, which might explain the uncertainty demonstrated by the quantitative findings. These findings are consistent with the theoretical and research literature, and extend our understanding by reflecting on the problems with integrating existing therapeutic

models and social justice action. Following this discussion of the findings I considered the implications of the findings to the wider counselling psychology profession, with particular reference to issues of power and professional identity. I then outlined the potential methodological weaknesses of the research and reflected on the future avenues for research which have been illuminated, proposing further research with diverse groups of counselling psychologists, longitudinal research, UK based quantitative research using the Social Issues Questionnaire, and participatory-action research. Finally to end this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, I reflected on the recommendations which have arisen from the research, which include theoretical, training and practice recommendations.

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## Appendix A

### Screen shots of the online Social Issues Questionnaire

Information Sheet (University of Manchester) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

manchester.ac.uk https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/TakeSurvey.aspx

My Surveys Information Sheet (University of Manchester)

The University of Manchester

MANCHESTER 1824

### Exploring Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice in the United Kingdom

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**Exploring Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice in the United Kingdom**

Page 2 of 10

**Information Sheet**

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a counselling psychology doctoral thesis. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. There will be an opportunity for me to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have, contact details are provided at the end of the information sheet. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Many thanks

What is the aim of the research?

Since the 2001 Houston National Conference, counselling psychology in the United States has made a shift toward making social justice an explicit focus of the profession. However within the United Kingdom counselling psychology literature little has been said about the relevance and place of social justice within the profession of counselling psychology specifically. This study aims to explore and gain an understanding of the place of social justice within the counselling psychology profession in this country.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to take part because you are a member of the counselling psychology community based in the United Kingdom.

Consent to participate (University of Manchester) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

manchester.ac.uk https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/TakeSurvey.aspx

My Surveys Consent to participate (University of Manchester)

The University of Manchester

MANCHESTER 1824

### Exploring Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice in the United Kingdom

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Page 3 of 10

**Consent to participate**

Now that you have read the information sheet, please read the below consent form and follow the instructions before beginning the questionnaire.

- If you are happy to participate please confirm the following:

	I confirm
1. I have read the information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
3. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- If you are happy to be re-contacted at a later date for the interview stage of this research please provide us with your name and a contact e-mail address below:

Name:

Contact email address:

Demographic Information (University of Manchester) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

manchester.ac.uk https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/TakeSurvey.aspx

My Surveys Demographic Information (Unive...

### Exploring Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice in the United Kingdom

MANCHESTER 1824

Page 4 of 10

#### Demographic Information

On this page I'd just like to gather a bit of demographic information about you before you begin the questionnaire.

- Gender:
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
  - ☐ Do not wish to disclose
- Are you:
  - ☐ A trainee counselling psychologist
  - ☐ A qualified counselling psychologist
- Age:
  - ☐ Under 25
  - ☐ 26-30
  - ☐ 31-35
  - ☐ 36-40
  - ☐ 41-45
  - ☐ 46-50
  - ☐ 51-55

Social Issues Questionnaire (University of Manchester) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

manchester.ac.uk https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/TakeSurvey.aspx

My Surveys Social Issues Questionnaire (Unl...

Page 5 of 10

#### Social Issues Questionnaire

The following pages contain questions from the Social Issues Questionnaire, please follow the instructions provided for each question.

Part 1: Instructions: The following is a list of social justice activities. Please indicate how much confidence you have in your ability to complete activity. Use the 0-9 point scale below to indicate your degree of confidence. How much confidence do you have in your ability to:

	0 - No confidence at all	1	2	3	4	5 - Some confidence	6	7	8	9 - Complete confidence
1. Respond to social injustice (e.g. discrimination, racism, religious intolerance) with nonviolent actions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Examine your own worldview, biases, and prejudicial attitudes after witnessing or hearing about social injustice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Actively support needs of marginalized social groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Help members from marginalized groups create more opportunities for success (e.g., educational, career) by...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix B

### The Social Issues Questionnaire

We are interested in learning about your knowledge of issues related to **social inequality** (e.g., poverty, historically underserved populations, oppression, sexism, discrimination, racism, religious intolerance) and engaging in **social justice activities** that seek to reduce and eliminate social injustice and inequality.

Your responses are anonymous so please answer as honestly as possible.

Part I. Instructions: The following is a list of social justice activities. Please indicate how much confidence you have in your ability to complete activity. Use the 0–9 point scale below to indicate your degree of confidence.

No Confidence at All			Some Confidence				Complete Confidence		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

How much confidence do you have in your ability to:

1. Respond to social injustice (e.g., discrimination, racism, religious intolerance) with nonviolent actions.
2. Examine your own worldview, biases, and prejudicial attitudes after witnessing or hearing about social injustice.
3. Actively support needs of marginalized social groups.
4. Help members from marginalized groups create more opportunities for success (e.g., educational, career) by developing relevant skills.
5. Raise others' awareness of the oppression and marginalization of minority groups.
6. Confront others that speak disparagingly about members of underprivileged groups.
7. Challenge an individual who displays racial, ethnic, and/or religious intolerance.
8. Convince others as to the importance of social justice.
9. Discuss issues related to racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism with your friends.
10. Volunteer as a tutor or mentor with youth from an underserved and underprivileged group.
11. Support efforts to reduce social injustice through your own local fundraising efforts.
12. Identify the unique social, economic, political, and/or cultural needs of a marginalized group in your own community.
13. Encourage and convince others to participate in community-specific social issues.
14. Develop and implement a solution to a community social issue such as unemployment, homelessness, or racial tension.
15. Challenge or address institutional policies that are covertly or overtly discriminatory.
16. Lead a group of coworkers in an effort to eliminate workplace discrimination in your place of employment.

17. Serve as a consultant for an institutional committee aimed at providing equal opportunities for underrepresented groups.
18. Advocate for social justice issues by becoming involved in local government.
19. Address structural inequalities and barriers facing racial and ethnic minorities by becoming politically active (e.g., helping to create government policy).
20. Raise awareness of social issues (e.g., inequality, discrimination) by engaging in political discourses or debates.

Part II. Instructions: Using the scale below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
0      1	2      3	4      5	6      7	8      9

Engaging in social justice activities would likely allow me to:

1. Reduce the oppression of certain groups.
2. Help provide equal opportunities for all groups and individuals.
3. Fulfill a sense of personal obligation.
4. Fulfill a sense of moral responsibility.
5. Fulfill a sense of social responsibility.
6. Make a difference in peoples' lives.
7. Do work or activities that are personally satisfying.
8. Get respect from others.
9. Be more competitive in applying for school or work.
10. Increase my sense of self-worth.

Part III. Instructions: Please indicate your degree of interest in doing each of the following activities.

Use the 0–9 scale to show how much interest you have in each activity.

Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Interest	Interest	Interest	Interest	Interest
0      1	2      3	4      5	6      7	8      9

How much interest do you have in:

1. Volunteering your time at a community agency (e.g. volunteering at a homeless shelter).
2. Reading about social issues (e.g., racism, oppression, inequality).
3. Going on a weeklong service or work project.
4. Enrolling in a course on social issues.
5. Watching television programs that cover social issues (e.g., history of marginalized group).
6. Supporting a political candidate on the basis of her or his stance on social issues.
7. Donating money to an organization committed to social issues.
8. Talking to others about social issues.
9. Selecting a career or job that deals with social issues.

Part IV. Instructions: Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree			Disagree		Unsure		Agree		Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. In the future, I intend to engage in social justice activities.
2. I have a plan of action for ways I will remain or become involved in social justice activities over the next year.
3. I think engaging in social justice activities is a realistic goal for me.
4. I am fully committed to engaging in social justice activities.

Part V. Instructions: Many factors can either support or hinder an individual's plans for engaging in social justice activities. We are interested in learning about the types of situations that could help or hinder your plans if you were to continue on in social justice activities. For the questions below, assume that you wanted to pursue some type of social justice activity. Using the 0–9 scale, show how likely you believe you would be to experience each of the following situations.

Not at All		A Little		Moderately		Quite		Extremely	
Likely		Likely		Likely		Likely		Likely	
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

If you were to engage in social justice activities, how likely would you be to:

1. Have access to a role model (i.e., someone you can look up to and learn from by observing).
2. Feel support for this decision from important people in your life.
3. Feel that there are people “like you” engaged in the same activities.
4. Feel that your family members support this decision.
5. Have access to a mentor who could offer you advice and encouragement.
6. Receive negative comments or discouragement from friends and family members about your engagement in social justice activities.
7. Worry that getting involved would require too much time or energy.
8. Feel that you didn't fit in socially with other people involved in the same activities.
9. Feel pressure from parents or other important people to change your mind regarding your decision to engage in social justice activities.

## Appendix C

### Research advert

#### ***Exploring Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice in the United Kingdom***

I am a counselling psychologist in training, studying on the Professional Doctorate programme at the University of Manchester and I am looking for participants to take part in my research project.

The purpose of the research is to develop an understanding of the place of social justice within the counselling psychology profession in the United Kingdom.

I am looking for both trainee and qualified counselling psychologists, currently based in the U.K., to take part in the research. The study has two stages. The first stage involves completing an online survey at the following link, which should take you no more than 30 minutes to complete.

As part of this, you will be asked whether you would be happy to be re-contacted at a later date. If you meet the selection criteria, and consent to be re-contacted at a later date you would then be invited to participate in the interview stage of the research which would involve taking part in a semi-structured interview (this would last up to an hour and would take place at a place, time and date to suit you).

If you would like to take part in the first stage of the research, please follow this link for more information and to access the questionnaire:

<https://selectsurveys.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=n20J4m2>

For further information, please contact me on:

Researcher: Laura Cutts  
[laura.cutts-2@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:laura.cutts-2@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)  
Supervisor: Dr Terry Hanley  
[terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Research Integrity Committee at the University of Manchester.



## **Appendix D**

### **Recruitment email to course directors**

Dr,

I'm a second year trainee on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at the University of Manchester and I am currently beginning my data collection for my thesis, which is looking at the place of social justice in our profession. I have attached my research advert, as I am looking to recruit both trainee and qualified counselling psychologists initially to complete an online questionnaire and following this potentially take part in an interview if they meet the selection criteria. I wondered whether you might be able to circulate this to the trainees on your Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and also to any qualified Counselling Psychologists on your staff if possible? I would very much appreciate it, many thanks for your time.

Best wishes,

Laura Cutts

Counselling Psychologist in Training

## **Appendix E**

### **Email reminder to participants for the qualitative phase of the research**

Hi,

Many thanks for taking the time to complete my survey on social justice in counselling psychology.

As it will have been a few months since some of you completed the survey, this is just a quick message to let you know I will be hopefully contacting those who meet the selection criteria in April/May to arrange interviews in late spring early summer.

Best wishes, and once again - many thanks for your time.

Laura Cutts

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Introductory Protocol**

Firstly, let me say thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. As you know from prior communication, you were invited to participate in the second stage of this research because of your responses on the Social Issues Questionnaire. Before we start the interview I'd like to go over how things are going to work if that's OK?

I want to remind you that I'm recording our conversation today for my research, I've got your signed consent form for this already but just to remind you that the recording will be deleted after transcription and the transcription will then be kept in an encrypted file. This file will be accessible only to myself and my supervisor. All efforts will be maintained to protect your confidentiality and if any quotes are used in any write ups of the research then I will use a pseudonym. If you change your mind about taking part and want to withdraw from the research just let me know. Also if there are any specific questions you do not wish to answer that's fine.

I expect that the interview will last around 1 hour, and I have some specific questions to ask you but I am keen to hear your ideas and thoughts in general. Some of the questions you might find challenging or difficult to answer initially but I am keen to hear any thoughts you might have on the subject.

Do you have any questions about what I've just told you?

Are you ready for me to begin taping?

Just to remind you that this part of the research project hopes to explore how counselling psychologists with a moderate to high interest in and commitment to social justice based in the UK understand social justice, and the relevance it has for the profession. I have planned three broad sections to the interview, firstly we will consider your understanding of social justice, then we'll move on to explore your thoughts on the place of social justice within counselling psychology, and finally we'll discuss how your commitment to social justice manifests in terms of social justice activities. Again, thank you for taking part.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **A. Exploring the definition of social justice**

I'm aware the questionnaire you completed gave you a short definition of what it meant by social justice but in this first part of the interview I'm interested in exploring how you understand social justice and what it means to you.

1. I wondered if you could tell me a bit about what you understand social justice to mean? I understand that you might not have a definition as such, but perhaps you could share any thoughts you might have on what social justice means to you?

Potential probe: what would you say are the key elements of social justice?

Potential probe: how easy or difficult do you find it to define social justice as a term?

### **B. Social Justice in Counselling Psychology**

The next couple of questions I have are about your interest in social justice ideas and values. Specifically, it's about how you see an interest in social justice fitting into the profession of counselling psychology.

2. You were selected for the second stage of this research because you scored as having a moderate to high interest in social justice on the online questionnaire. For example one of the questions looking at social justice interest related to whether you were interested in selecting a career or job that deals with social issues.

So I was wondering how, if at all, you see the ideas of social justice as being relevant to the profession of counselling psychology?

Potential probe: how large a part do you feel social justice plays in the identity of counselling psychology in the UK?

3. Are there any ways in which you feel that social justice is not relevant to counselling psychology?

Potential probe: could you say a bit more about that?

4. Moving beyond the profession as a whole to your individual role in the counselling psychology field, I wondered if you could tell me in what ways do you see social justice values as connected to your own individual professional role?

Potential probe: how important is social justice to your own professional identity?

### **C. Social justice action**

As well as scoring highly on the social justice interest component of the questionnaire, you were asked to participate in this interview because you scored highly on the social justice commitment scale. This section of the interview aims to explore your experience of social justice action and activities.

5. How do you think your commitment to social justice manifests in terms of action or behaviour in your work in counselling psychology?

Potential probe: In what ways do you consider your commitment to social justice to manifest in your therapeutic work as a counselling psychologist?

Potential probe: Could you give me some examples of this?

6. Outside of your work as a counselling psychologist have you been involved in social justice activities in the past? If so, I was wondering if you could tell me in what way and a bit perhaps about what your involvement was.

Potential probe: could you tell me a bit more about your experiences?

7. One of the items on the social justice commitment scale of the questionnaire was 'In the future I intend to engage in social justice activities'. I wondered have you considered what sorts of social justice action you might be involved in?

Potential probe: how easy do you find it to decide on social justice activities to be involved in?

**D. Any further comments**

8. Is there anything further you'd like to add which you think is relevant to the things we've been exploring?

## **Appendix G**

### **Information sheet for the qualitative phase**

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a counselling psychology doctoral thesis. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. There will be an opportunity for me to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have, contact details are provided at the end of the information sheet. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Many thanks.

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

Since the 2001 Houston National Conference, counselling psychology in the United States has made a shift toward making social justice an explicit focus of the profession. However within the United Kingdom counselling psychology literature little has been said about the relevance and place of social justice within the profession of counselling psychology specifically. This study aims to explore and gain an understanding of the place of social justice within the counselling psychology profession in this country.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been asked to take part for a number of reasons. Firstly, you are a member of the counselling psychology community in the United Kingdom and therefore can offer insight into the profession. Secondly, you took part in the first phase of this research, and based on your scores on the Social Issues Questionnaire, were identified as having a moderate to high interest in, and commitment to, social justice.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview which is planned to last for roughly one hour. This can be conducted at a time and location convenient to you; alternatively this can be conducted over the telephone where a face to face interview isn't convenient. Within this interview you will be asked about your interest in and commitment to social justice: how you incorporate this into your professional role, if and how you see social justice as being relevant to your professional role as well as the wider profession of counselling psychology in the United Kingdom.

#### **What happens to the data collected?**

The audio recording of the interview will be deleted after transcription and the electronic document containing the transcription will be kept in an encrypted file. Any paper copies will be kept in locked storage. Only the researcher will have access to the transcribed interview. Some quotes may be used in the write-up of the research, but these will be in no way identifiable: where there is uncertainty, the researcher will check this with you. After data analysis has been conducted you will be given the chance to look at the themes generated and provide any comments at this stage.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

All efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. As mentioned above, the electronic data will be kept in encrypted files and there will be no identifiable information contained within the write-up of the report. Any hard copies of the transcript will be kept in locked storage. Your real name will not be used in any written reports and any quotes used will be non-identifiable. These safeguards are in compliance with the University of Manchester regulations on data protection.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or change my mind?**

Participation in this research is voluntary. You will be given time to read and understand this information sheet before you are asked if you would consent to take part in the study. If you have any questions during this time do not hesitate to contact the researcher. If you do agree to take part there will be a number of points where you will have the opportunity to change your mind if you wish. If you sign the consent form but then change your mind at any point in the interview being recorded you can withdraw from the research. Finally, you can change your mind and withdraw from the research after reading a cursory analysis of the data, if you choose to see this.

**What is the duration of the research?**

The interview is planned to last roughly an hour, with additional time commitments of checking the themes generated if you choose to see these.

**Where will the research be conducted?**

As detailed above, the interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you; alternatively a time for a telephone interview can be scheduled.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The outcomes of the study will form part of a University thesis, and there may be further publications in academic journals. As detailed above, in these publications there will be no identifiable information written about you.

**Contact for further information***Researcher:*

Laura Cutts, trainee counselling psychologist at the University of Manchester

Email: [laura.cutts@hotmail.com](mailto:laura.cutts@hotmail.com)

Phone : 07843938856

*Supervisor:*

Terry Hanley, Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, at the University of Manchester

Email : [terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk)

Phone : 01612758627



## **Appendix H**

### **Email to recruit participants for the qualitative phase**

Hi,

Thank you for participating in the first part of my research 'Exploring U.K. Based Counselling Psychologists' Commitment to Social Justice'. Your responses met the criteria for inclusion in the second phase of the research and so I am emailing to ask you whether you would be happy to take part in an interview about your interest in, and commitment to, social justice.

I have attached an information sheet about this phase of the research, and if you would be happy to consent please complete the attached consent form and reply, letting me know your availability in July and August of this year. Initially I will try and arrange the interviews for this time period, although if this is not possible, a later interview may be arranged.

Could you also let me know where you would ideally want the interview to take place – I hope to be able to travel and complete all interviews face to face but where this is not possible we could try and arrange a telephone interview.

If you have any questions about the interview please don't hesitate to contact either myself or my supervisor (contact details are provided on the information sheet).

I look forward to hearing from you,

Many thanks

Laura Cutts

Counselling Psychologist in Training

## Appendix I

### Member check documentation

You are being asked to participate in a member check of the initial qualitative data analysis of the interview you took part in on social justice in counselling psychology. Below I have hopefully explained how the analysis has progressed so far, and what is involved in the member check for you.

#### *What analysis has been done so far?*

This is a very early point in the process of data analysis. Initially I transcribed the recording of the interview. Following this I went through the transcript and broke what was said down into units of meaning ('meaning units'), which range in size. These meaning units were given conceptual labels and assigned to categories. I have been using a process of constant comparison which means that each new meaning unit I find in the transcript is compared to the categories I have already generated, and if I think that the meaning units appears to have a similar meaning then I add the meaning unit to that category. Where the meaning unit appears to be referring to something new, a new category is formed for that meaning unit. This process has provided me with an initial list of categories and the meaning units. Some categories have only one meaning unit in and some have several. **As this is an early point in the data analysis process these categories are likely to change with further analysis**, but I hope to gather some feedback from participants at this point.

#### *What is involved in the member check process?*

Below I have presented the meaning units from your transcript alongside their conceptual labels and the category they have been assigned to at this stage. If possible I would like you to read through the meaning units and categories and at the end you will be asked to respond to two short questions. The first is about whether the categories make sense to you; the second is about how accurately you feel the categories capture the meaning of what you were saying in our interview. Finally you will be asked if you have any additional comments on this initial analysis. I expect in total the member check process will take roughly 30 minutes to an hour of your time. Participation in the member check part of the research is completely voluntary.

#### *How will my responses to this member check be used?*

I hope to include participants' collated responses to the member check in my presentation of the findings of the research. This will hopefully add to the 'trustworthiness' of the data and give the reader a picture of how well my analysis represented what the research participants were saying. This may be in the main body of the text or in an appendix depending on how much space I have in the main thesis.

## Member Check

1. Do the initial categories generated make sense to you? Please mark on the scale below and provide any additional qualitative comments in the space provided.

<b>1</b> The categories do not make sense to me		<b>3</b> The categories make some sense to me		<b>5</b> The categories make complete sense to me

Comments:

--

2. How accurately do the initial categories capture the meaning of what you were saying in the interview you took part in? Please mark on the scale below and provide any additional qualitative comments in the space provided.

<b>1</b> Not at all accurate		<b>3</b> Adequately accurate		<b>5</b> Very accurate

Comments:

3. If you have any further comments on this initial analysis of the interview, please provide them below:

## Appendix J

### Biases and Assumptions

I have collated here a list of the main biases and assumptions which I held about the research and the topic of study, which became apparent through the process of writing in my research diary and engaging in the bracketing interview. I present them here to inform the reader and add to the trustworthiness of the research (Elliott et al., 1999). Where appropriate I have used extracts from my research diary for the purposes of illustration.

1. I assumed that participants would all score themselves very highly on the social justice interest and commitment subscales of the Social Issues Questionnaire. For an example see the following extract from my research diary:

*“At the beginning I assumed that I would get people scoring extremely highly on all subscales on the SIQ. I suppose I thought that social desirability would shine through and that counselling psychologists would be big on saying they are all for social justice. I expected it to be the case that the majority of participants would respond in this way. I was surprised to find that scores were much lower on the questionnaire however. There was a fair amount of variation but what I really saw was lower scores than I would have predicted. Particularly in relation to the social justice commitment subscale which is about action and actually getting involved in social justice activities. Actually a trainee at Manchester came up to me and said that they found completing the questionnaire really interesting because it made them think “yeah I’m all for this, but would I or do I actually do anything?” This is paraphrased obviously but the implication was that they had been surprised at their lower scores similar to how I was across the sample”*

2. Similarly, I was pessimistic about the level of social justice action which my interview participants would be involved in. I assumed that counselling psychologists, even those with a high interest in and commitment to social justice, would not report many ways in which their commitment to social justice manifested. I assumed that participants would be vague about the way in which their commitment to social justice manifested and would struggle to come up with social justice action.

3. On a personal level, I struggle to integrate my personal interest in matters of social justice and myself as a practitioner in counselling psychology.

4. I’m unsure about whether I see social justice action as part of my role as a counselling psychologist. For an example of this see the following extract from my research diary:

*“I’m not sure I do see the action as part of my role as a counselling psychologist. I suppose I do in a fairly limited way. Like I think we should make psychological services and therapy accessible to everyone. Not have it quicker or better for those*

*who can afford it because those sort of systems just maintain the unequal society we are stuck in. But I have tons of clients I see who I'm not sure I can do the social justice work side of things with them. Does advocacy confuse the role of a psychologist? I'm not sure"*

5. I have an assumption that social justice is about equity across all members of society.

6. I have concerns about the practical nature of a 'social justice agenda' for UK counselling psychology profession. I think that it would be challenging and would mean that counselling psychologists need to significantly adapt their current practice rather than just state a commitment to social justice – I consider action to be very important *if* the profession cares about social justice.

## Appendix K

### Summary of member check data

1. Do the initial categories generated make sense to you? Please mark on the scale below and provide any additional qualitative comments in the space provided.

<b>1</b> The categories do not make sense to me		<b>3</b> The categories make some sense to me		<b>5</b> The categories make complete sense to me
				3 participants

Comments:

“Since the interview I have thought a lot about social justice, and also how it fits with counselling psychology and my personal life experiences. It was surprisingly difficult to articulate my beliefs and feelings around social justice, to translate things sitting deep inside me into words.

I responded to the request for participants because this felt important – important to help me articulate my own feelings and beliefs around the concept, and important to be part of this.

I would like to see social justice become a part of counselling psychology training.”

“But I am talking about the same thing in a variety of ways so it feels like a number of them represent the main concept that I am trying to convey...but I’m fine if you feel the need to categorise them/break them down further...

There is only one category that did not seem to fit as closely as it could but I wouldn’t say that it was inaccurate as it stands”

2. How accurately do the initial categories capture the meaning of what you were saying in the interview you took part in? Please mark on the scale below and provide any additional qualitative comments in the space provided.

<b>1</b> Not at all accurate		<b>3</b> Adequately accurate		<b>5</b> Very accurate
			1 participant	1 participant

Comments:

“As I say you just seem to have broken them down further where as I am not sure that there is much difference in them, just different narratives/examples/metaphors for the same thing  
But I’m happy with what you have done because you have the bigger picture of what your analysis looks like”

3. If you have any further comments on this initial analysis of the interview, please provide them below:



## **Appendix L**

### **Information sheet for the quantitative phase**

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a counselling psychology doctoral thesis. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. There will be an opportunity for me to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have, contact details are provided at the end of the information sheet. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Many thanks.

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

Since the 2001 Houston National Conference, counselling psychology in the United States has made a shift toward making social justice an explicit focus of the profession. However within the United Kingdom counselling psychology literature little has been said about the relevance and place of social justice within the profession of counselling psychology specifically. This study aims to explore and gain an understanding of the place of social justice within the counselling psychology profession in this country.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been asked to take part because you are a member of the counselling psychology community based in the United Kingdom.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete the Social Issues Questionnaire (Miller, Sendrowitz, Connacher, Blanco, Pena, Bernadi & Morere, 2009) and provide some brief demographic information. The questions on the Social Issues Questionnaire focus on social inequality issues such as poverty, oppression and discrimination, and social justice activities that seek to reduce these things. Examples of questions include 'How much interest do you have in talking to others about social issues'. Completing this should take about

As part of this you will be asked if you would be happy to be contacted for a second interview stage of the research. There is no requirement to consent to be re-contacted, or to take part in the second stage of the research. If you do consent you will be asked to take part in an interview at a later date focusing on social justice and counselling psychology.

#### **What happens to the data collected?**

Electronic copies of the data will be kept in password protected files and any paper copies of data will be kept in locked storage. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

All efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. As mentioned above, the electronic data will be kept in password protected files and there will be no identifiable information contained within the write-up of the report. All information about participant's identities will be kept separately from the data gathered during the study, and will only be matched with the participant's consent. All participants will be assigned an identification number which will be used to match responses. These safeguards are in compliance with the University of Manchester regulations on data protection.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or change my mind?**

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you have any questions about the research after reading this information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. If you decide to take part and later change your mind you can withdraw without giving reasons, and your data collected will be destroyed.

**What is the duration of the research?**

The questionnaire should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The outcomes of the study will form part of a University thesis, and there may be further publications in academic journals. As detailed above, in these publications there will be no identifiable information written about you.

**Contact for further information***Researcher:*

Laura Cutts, trainee counselling psychologist at the University of Manchester

Email: [laura.cutts@hotmail.com](mailto:laura.cutts@hotmail.com)

Phone : 07843938856

*Supervisor:*

Terry Hanley, Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, at the University of Manchester

Email : [terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk)

Phone : 01612758627

## Appendix M

### Consent form for the qualitative phase

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

	Please Initial Box
1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily	
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason	
3. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed	
4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in any write-up	
5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals	

I agree to take part in the above project:

Name of participant	Date	Signature